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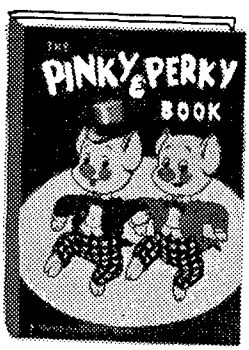

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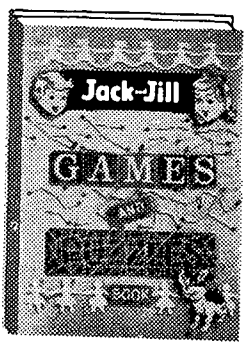

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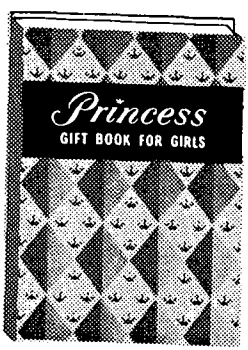

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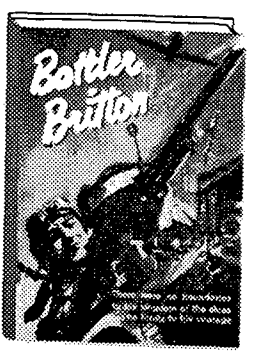

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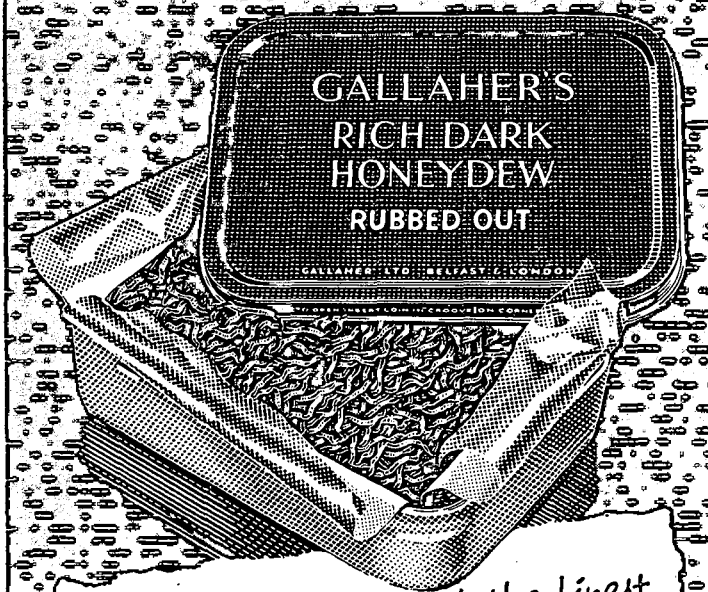

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Log Book

WE KNOW, of course, that the Scots have a profound respect for education, but just how deep this goes has been forcibly brought home to us during a recent trip through the land of porridge and pine. Roughly every ten miles along our route, it seemed, on the top of every other heather-covered hummock, we saw large, stark granite obelisks, rearing menacing fingers against the dour Caledonian sky. If we left the car and toiled to the tops of these hills—as curiosity mostly obliged us to—we generally found a carved inscription along these lines:

ALEXANDER STEWART, 1760-1840
Reared as a shepherd lad on these hills, he educated himself and became Minister of Lower Haugh. He was Professor of Sanskrit at St. Andrews from 1839-1840. *This monument was raised at the expense of his parishioners.*

You have to take off your hat to a race like that. It must have meant weeks, if not months, of labour to drag the granite blocks up those hillsides, and all to commemorate one year of Sanskrit.

The last monument we visited was truly enigmatic. Situated near Kirkcudbright, it stood witness to the memory of William Neilson. Under his name, and nineteenth century dates, were carved the inscrutable words HOT BLAST, and nothing more. So what is one to make of that? A prophecy of the atom age? A record of the sentiments of the people who raised the monument? It remains a mystery, and Ozymandias, King of Kings, has nothing on Mr. Neilson.

Reading the local paper under the gnomic shadow of HOT BLAST, we discovered other cryptic facets of the complex

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Gael. Why, for instance, should somebody in Edinburgh be advertising for one hundred grandfather clocks? *One Hundred* has a purposive, fanatical sound about it, recalling the lady, the psychiatrist, and the pancakes—" You must come and see my collection, I've got hundreds in the trunk under the bed . . ."

We were perplexed, too, by the local paper's announcement of a Great Special Sale of Cross Lambs and Cross Gimmers. One supposes that if they are really bad-tempered the only thing to do is to dispose of them, but what are Gimmers, and more especially Cheviot Gimmers, not to mention Greyfaced Wedders, which are described, in unexpectedly contemporary idiom, as Tops? They have a faintly Huck Finn flavour—" I'm a-livin' now with the grey-faced Wedder of Jedge Thatcher, and she'd be tops if she warn't so all-fired god-fearin'." The whole thing bristles with complexity to the simple Sassenach.

The advertisements fascinated us even more. AIR SON LUACH DAINGNIGHTE, one of them said, sounding like an invitation to a kind of Gaelic Son et Lumière, or Highland Walpurgis Nacht. " Faic na than againn," it went on, " de charban a fhuair cosnadh mar tha aig priscan na's saoire na gheibhear an Alba." Or, in other words, Don't get caught using carbon paper to fake signatures in your autograph Album?

It continues, " Gabheidh dail-paigheadh agus dion a thoirt du'n mhoille." Which might read, translated, I thought you'd be for it if you would be so confoundedly pig-headed.

Or did we catch a passing reference to Argosy?

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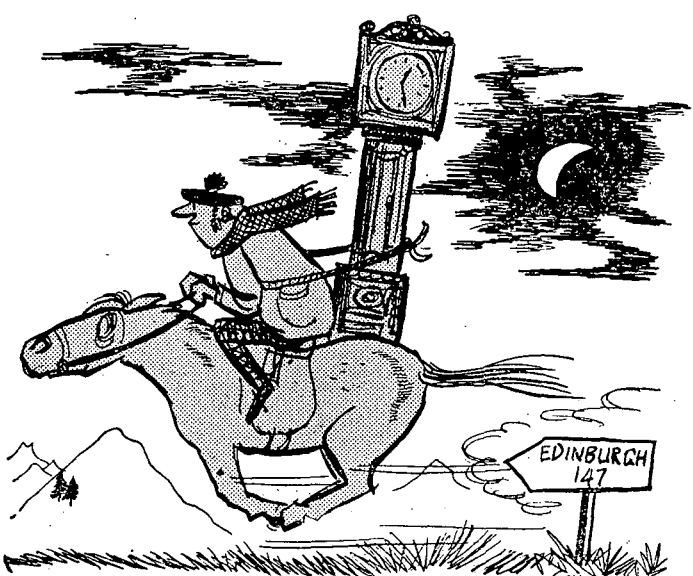
We should like to think so, for in the small town where we bought the paper we noticed with pleasure a Horatio Square, and at the bottom of the advertisement was a helpful note: "If you can't read Gaelic, just call and see the wonderful values we have to offer."

Alan Scholefield, journalist aged 29, says that he has "retired" twice already from journalism in order to write fiction: once at the age of 24, and again last year. South African by birth, he has lived in Spain and Austria, and worked in Fleet Street.

We always welcome a new story by **Edith Pargeter** in Argosy. In her latest she returns to her native soil—she was born near Coalbrookdale, cradle of the Industrial Revolution—but does not remain at midland ground-level for long.

W. P. Domanowski is American by birth, but he has travelled extensively. He gives an impressive roster of professions he has followed, including cadmium barrel plater, ghost writer, mail sorter, and attendant in a mental hospital. He has recently been on a scoot round Europe (from which he and his scooter bear some scars) and is now en route for home in Michigan.

JOHN SILVER



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HOT LOAD

Tricky to get rid of . . . dangerous, too

BY PATRICK RYAN

"COME on, for heaven's sake, Bomber!" pleaded Eddie Conroy. "I told you we got to be out and away by half-three. The nightwatchman will be round here any minute."

"All right, all right. Don't be so windy. You ain't the brave boy you were six years ago, are you?" The tall man in the driver's seat chuckled quietly. "Anyway, here's Tony with the last of the load now."

A squat figure came from the black hulk of the warehouse and put a long cardboard crate in the back of the van. "O.K., Bomber. All in now."

He released the handbrake, the van rolled down the slope, and the engine picked up smoothly.

"Hey, there! Stop! Stop!" Someone was racing across the yard, waving a torch.

"It's Garvey, the watchman," yelled Eddie. "He's going to shut the gates."

The driver accelerated and headed straight for the running man.

"No!" Eddie shouted. "No! You said no violence."

"Shut up."

The wing caught the watchman and flung him across the entrance. As they swept by, Eddie saw his head crash against the pillar, his body collapse like a broken puppet.

Not Garvey, he thought. Not old Garvey! I didn't mean anything to happen to him. They said no violence. I wouldn't have come in otherwise . . . He gripped the door-handle. A hundred yards ahead was a double bend . . . They roared too fast into the first corner, braked hard, and the van swayed drunkenly.

Eddie slipped the latch and dropped off the running-board. He kept his feet for a few paces and then rolled over in the gutter. He looked after the van as it skidded on the peak of the bend, ran the offside wheels up on the traffic island, crashed back to the road again, and ground off into the night, a spring clearly broken, the body sagging precariously over to the right.

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Eddie ran back to the gates. The watchman's torch lay beside him, lighting up his grey head and the widening pool of blood. He turned him over on his back. The face was ash-white, eyes closed, the hands slack and lifeless.

He's dead! They've killed poor old Garvey. Please God, let him not be dead.

There was nothing he could do there. He climbed back on to the loading bank, found a telephone, and dialled the operator.

"Send an ambulance to Mayerling's Fur Warehouse in the Old Kent Road. There's a man badly hurt by the gates. He's losing blood."

He hung up and ran out of the yard. Small and thin, he padded fast as fear through the back-doubles towards his home. "Why did I let them talk me into it," he whimpered to himself. "Why did I ever listen to them? Six years I've gone straight, and then they have to come along . . ."

A wild kid he'd been, what the Old Kent Road of the twenties had made him. But they fixed him in the end and he got four years' hard for doing a jeweller's. And it was in prison he'd met up with Bomber. He'd still have been on the crook now, but for Mollie Hegarty.

He loved her and he married her, and because she wouldn't have him any other way, he went straight. The job as a packer at Mayerling's didn't pay much but at least it was safe and steady. But it wouldn't let him give Mollie the things she deserved. A backstreet two-up, secondhand furniture, lime-wash on the walls, that was all he could do for her and the kids. And he wanted them to have some of the good things in life.

So he'd gone to the dog-track, borrowed money when he lost, borrowed more to try to win his debts. By the time he met Bomber and Tony a couple of weeks ago, he was desperate for quick, easy money. And when they heard he worked at Mayerling's, they put him straight on to it.

"You know the way in, how the watchman works, where the stuff is kept. I'll get the lorry and Tony'll look after the locks. Easy as kiss your hand. One little job, no violence, and you're on a hundred quid just like that. Think of it, Eddie, a hundred quid and all your troubles are over."

He'd fallen for it like a fool, and now old Garvey was lying there in his own blood. If he died, it'd be murder, straight out . . . He'd have to get away, beat it before they pinned it on him. If you got a record, you never stand a chance. He had to get away, somewhere, anywhere, tonight.

The church clock struck four as he gently opened his front

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door. In the bedroom the gas-jet was turned down to a glimmer. Mollie lay asleep, her hair a black-bright stream across the pillow. He opened the drawer where she kept her purse.

"Eddie! Where've you been till now?" She reached out and turned up the light. He faced her and she screamed.

"Eddie, your hands! Your shirt! It's all over blood."

He looked at the red stains and spread his hands hopelessly, helplessly.

"Mollie," he moaned. "Mollie. I'm sorry . . ." He slumped on to the bed and she pillowed his head in her arms.

You could see the tower of the Catholic Church from the Old Kent Road, rising above the ranks of grime-brick houses, standing like a guardian over the people below.

Father Gregory, parish priest these twenty years, sat in his room working busily at the half-yearly Accommodation Return demanded by the diocese. He was a big man, handsome-bellied, and bearded like a pirate.

"Holy Father grant me patience!" He slammed down his pen in exasperation. "What is the area of the School Hall? Every six months they ask me, and every six months I tell them it's the same. And will be too, till the Bishop sees the light and builds me another."

He was saved from further indiscipline by a knock on the door.

"Come in."

It was Mollie Conroy. "Could I speak to you for a minute, Father?"

Her face was grey and drawn, the eyes full and sad. The temper went out of the priest and he was all gentleness.

"Sit down, Mollie. What's it all about?"

She was near tears but he didn't think she'd cry. The Hegarty women were strong. The husband was the weaker vessel of the Conroys.

"It's bad trouble I'm in, Father, and nobody I dare tell but might make it worse. I can't talk to you about it, honestly, unless you promise you'll not tell a word to anybody else."

"How can I promise? I may need the help of others to help you."

"Nobody else. It would be too dangerous. Can't it be like confession, Father, a secret between you and me?"

"But is it your confession?"

"No."

"Then it's your husband in trouble?"

She pressed her lips in stubborn silence. Her hands were trembling in her lap.

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" Is it the police you're afraid I'll tell? "

" No! I can't say anything unless you promise. He doesn't know I've come to you—" She stopped herself and got up from the chair. " I'm sorry I bothered you. There wasn't anybody else."

He stopped her at the door.

" All right, Mollie," he sighed in resignation. " I promise."

" You'll speak to nobody but me? "

" I will not. There, you have my word."

She went back to the chair and poured out all she knew about Eddie and the robbery at Mayerling's.

". . . and he was all for packing up and running away but I told him the minute he does that he's just telling the police he was mixed up in it. I got him to go to work as usual this morning but he's scared to death and if he knows I've told anybody, even you, he'll panic and run off. And that'll be the end of everything."

" How is Tom Garvey? "

" He's not—not dead. He's in the hospital."

" What happened to the men in the van? You said it was damaged."

" One of them phoned Eddie this morning. They think the door flew open by accident and he fell out. The van broke down and they had to hide it up somewhere near the river. So they haven't got rid of the furs yet."

" Does Eddie know where the furs are? "

" No. They wouldn't say on the phone."

" What are the names of these two men? "

" I don't know. Eddie won't tell me. He says if he splits on them, they could split on him. All I know is that when he was talking on the phone, he called the man Bomber."

" Bomber? Do you know where they live? "

" No. Just somewhere north of the river. He won't tell me too much because he doesn't want me to get mixed up in it. He's a good man, my Eddie, Father. He didn't want the money for himself. He was thinking of me and the kids. He's weak and he's a fool but he's a good husband and still would be if those devils hadn't come along. If I could get my hands on them—"

Her fingers crooked like claws.

" He might tell me their names if I talked to him."

" No. You mustn't do that. You promised. I know the state he's in. He'd do anything. Even—even kill himself."

At last she began to cry. The priest put out a hand of comfort.

" I'll not go near him, Mollie. I'll keep my promise. But that weeping won't help us, will it? And you a Hegarty, too."

She dried her tears. " I'm sorry, Father."

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" That's better now. It's great trouble we're in, Mollie, but we'll find a way out of it. Somehow, we'll find a way."

And he sent her home to get some sleep, her eyes brighter now that she had shared her load.

We'll find a way, Father Gregory repeated to himself, but it's Sherlock Holmes we'll be needing to do it. What do we know? Two men—one called Bomber—from among the million or so in North London organised the robbery. They've hidden the lorry with the furs somewhere near the river. Conroy's the only person can identify them and him we can't ask. Mollie's right about that. He'd be away like a jack-rabbit at the first word, heading straight back to prison.

And, whichever way the affair ends, no good will be done to anybody by sending him back to gaol. Mollie Conroy left with three children to fend for, Eddie coming out a second-time loser, little chance of finding another job, pushed back to crime again just to get a living. And he did phone for that ambulance; no one can take that away from him . . .

Crime was crime, the law was the law, and social justice must be done. Father Gregory disputed none of these things but, in his philosophy, the interests of his parishioners always came first.

His values were ethical, not secular, and sins were expiated by retribution, repentance, and reform. He would not countenance the vicious, those moved only by greed, but he was ever out to help the ignorant, the stupid, the weak, those who were no better than their environment had allowed.

Who were the sufferers in this affair? Tom Garvey and Jacob Mayerling. Why add Mollie Conroy and her kids? If Mayerling got his furs back, if recompense could be made to Garvey, who would then be worse off? Conroy would have had a scare to keep him straight for life. The North London pair would hang themselves in the end. So, first to retribution, then he'd see about repentance and reform.

" He's got a head like a rock, that old Garvey," said the doctor. " And that telephone call made all the difference. It looked nasty at first but there's no fracture and surprisingly little concussion. He's awake now and taking some late breakfast. You can see him if you only stay a minute or two."

The nightwatchman, turbaned in bandages, was drinking a cup of tea.

" I'm sorry to hear of all this trouble, Tom," said Father Gregory. " And how are you feeling now? "

" My head's ringing a bit and I'm stiff from top to toe, but they tell me nothing's broken."

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"Did you recognise any of the devils that set on you?"

"No, Father. They were all inside the van and driving straight at me."

"Did you hear any names? Any of our local boys involved?"

"No idea. Like I told Inspector Fenton, it was all over so quick."

"Inspector Fenton. Is he up here?"

"Left just before you came in."

"Well then, I'll not be keeping you from your rest, Tom. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"There are some things from my hut at the warehouse that I'd like up here, Father." He looked away so that he didn't have to meet the priest's eye. "Some books and papers on the shelf. If you wouldn't mind . . ."

"I'll have them up this afternoon."

As he crossed the entrance hall, he saw the local plainclothes chief talking to his sergeant.

"Hullo, Inspector. Would you be going back to the station?"

"I am, Father. Would you like a lift?"

"I would that. Hospitals are hard on the feet."

The car pulled away down the drive.

"Have you caught those villains at Mayerling's yet, Inspector?"

"Give us a chance, Father. We've nothing to go on yet. Old Garvey can't give us any help. But we may do better from the other end."

"The other end?"

"From the receiving end, the fence. Furs are tricky things to get rid of. There aren't above ten fences in London handle them this big. You've got to unload them quickly, too, if you're going to make good money."

"Really? Why is that?"

"It's a compact trade. A description can be got all round in a couple of days. And once that's done, chummy has a hot load on his hands. And there's nothing slides down the market like a hot load of furs."

"I see. So you will be watching the fences."

"*Are* watching, Father. We reckon these boyos will have got the loot to a fence last night. And the fence will be moving it on pretty sharpish today, or tomorrow at the latest."

"But supposing the thieves didn't get the—the loot to a receiver last night. What if they just hid it somewhere?"

"All the better. Thieves aren't as clever as fences. They'll have a load that's losing value hourly. And they've got to get it to a fur-man in the next couple of days.

"Fences are clever, but they're not brave. The longer chummy

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holds that load himself, the hotter it gets. The small men won't touch it after twenty-four hours. Then he'll have to start peddling his proposition around, singing real loud up among the four or five big men. And we'll be listening, Father, we'll be listening."

"How very interesting. And these big men—you actually know their names?"

"We know them. The trouble is to pin them. People like old Jobie Hazenfeld, cunning as a cartload of foxes."

"Jobie Hazenfeld? Is he a big man?"

"Jobie's the top fence in the fur line. And other lines, too, the old devil. If he won't take your stuff, you might as well drop it in the drink." The inspector chuckled. "You're very interested, Father Gregory. Are you thinking of taking up larceny yourself?"

"If I do, Inspector, you can rely that I'll bring my loot to you for professional advice."

The car turned into the backstreets and pulled up opposite an alley between two derelict factories.

"We're going straight into the garage behind the station. Will this do you, Father?"

"Splendidly. Thank you for the lift—and the conversation. Most fascinating."

The priest watched reflectively as the car pulled across the road and down the alley to the garage.

Half an hour later, he was ushered into Jacob Mayerling's office.

"Good morning, Mr. Mayerling. I've just been to see Tom Garvey and he asked me to get some books for him from his hut."

"I'll get them up for you." He spoke on the telephone. "They tell me Tom's going to be all right?"

"That's right. He had a very lucky escape. But he'll be in hospital for a couple of weeks. If you don't mind my asking, Mr. Mayerling, how will he be for money?"

Mayerling raised a podgy hand.

"He'll be O.K. I look after my people, don't you worry. Old Tom'll get his pay as usual. And a bit more besides. If he hadn't been on the job and scared them off, they might have taken a lot more."

"Did you lose many furs last night?"

"About two thousand pounds' worth. Three hundred or so dressed skins. I've got it insured, of course. But there were sixty black-petal ermine that I'd got together for a special piece. Lovely they were. Fit for the Queen herself and it took a mint of time and trouble collecting them."

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" What a shame. I suppose you'd rather have your furs back than the money."

" Dead right I would. Ah! Here are the books. Thank you, Millie . . . There you are, Father Gregory. Old Tom's prayer-books that he wants to study in bed." He shook his head in mock severity. " They're a wicked lot, those Christians of yours. Fancy sending his parish priest for the likes of these! "

There were two paperbacks, *The Greyhound Book of Form* and *Winning Systems at the Dogs*. The pages of the big black note-book were covered with pencil records of track names, dates of races, and trap numbers. The priest tucked them under his arm.

" You shouldn't say such things about Christians, Mr. Mayer-ling. I've had my eye on you for quite a while, and one of these days I'm going to make a convert of you."

" Me? " said Jacob, grinning and spreading his hands. " How can I be converted? I don't know nothing about dog racing."

During his midday meal at the presbytery, Father Gregory took stock of the situation. Garvey, thanks be, was going to be all right. He would see later about Conroy paying him something in anonymous recompense as well.

But if retribution was to be made to Mayerling, he'd have to find a way to get the furs out of hiding and back to him within the next forty-eight hours. By then, it seemed clear, either a fence or the police would have them.

Bomber. That was the lead he had over the police. And Bomber knew where the furs were.

How to find him? He lived north of the river and he'd been in prison with Conroy. Wandsworth, that was, he remembered visiting Eddie there. Bomber? It rang a bell somewhere in his memory. It was a nickname. Where had he heard it before? Bomber?

Then it came to him. The Army. It was an old nickname dating from the Great War. The Mills bomb, the hand-grenade which had been responsible for all the Millses being called Bomber. The nickname had been absorbed into the cockney language along with the Spud Murphys, Chalky Whites, Snowy Bakers, and Smudger Smiths. Bomber Mills, that would be it.

He rattled over to Wandsworth in his ancient Austin Seven. He was well known at all the London prisons, thanks to his parishioners who, by diligent law-breaking, maintained a continuous membership at each.

" I'm sorry to be troubling you, Mr. Mulloon," he said to the officer in charge of the records, " but I'm trying to trace someone by the name of Mills who was in here about six years or more

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ago. A member of my parish is anxious to contact him on a matter of mutual benefit to both."

After a bit of delving in registers and indexes, he managed, without revealing Conroy's name, to locate three prisoners named Mills who might have filled the bill. One was aged seventy-three, one was still serving his sentence, and the last was thirty-four years old, unmarried, and with an address at 27 Borcum Street, Stepney.

On the way back, he stopped his car by the pond on Clapham Common and spent half an hour meditating, making notes, and communing with the ducks.

"Well," he said finally, to a solemn red-headed pochard, "it may be a pretty chancy idea but it's the best I can think of in the time. At least, we'll be no worse off if it fails."

At five o'clock that evening, the telephone rang at 27 Borcum Street. A tall shaggy-haired man answered it. "Hullo."

A guttural voice spoke dictatorially. "Is Mr. Bomber Mills there?"

"Who wants him?"

"Tell him Jobie Hazenfeld."

"Who?"

"Jobie Hazenfeld. You deaf in your ears or something?"

"This is Bomber Mills, Mr. Hazenfeld." His voice was suddenly full of respect. "I'm sorry but I ain't never met you and I didn't expect it would be you. I got to be careful."

"Is all right, Mr. Mills. I never blame nobody for being careful. I been hearing things about you. I got the word you been pushing a load round the little men might interest me. You placed it yet?"

"No, but—"

"I got no time for no buts. How many you got?"

"Twelve cases. Just over three hundred pieces."

"That checks with the list I got on the vine. Says you got sixty black-petal ermine among them."

"That's right."

"Very nice. I'll do business. Four ton for the lot."

Four hundred pounds, a fifth of the value, that was pretty good.

"O.K. You got a deal, Mr. Hazenfeld."

"Not so fast, Mr. Mills. It's a deal only if I get that load tonight. Without fail. You got to deliver the way I want tonight or there's no deal. What you say?"

"Tonight, anywhere you say."

"Right. Then it's a deal at four ton. I pay after delivery."

"Done. Where?"

"You bring the stuff on wheels to Blackfriars Bridge dead on

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half-eleven tonight. There'll be a man of mine standing on the north side, just outside the station. He'll be wearing a pale raincoat and carrying a stick. Ask him for the nearest petrol station. He'll get in and show you where to go. Got it?"

They checked the instructions and rang off . . .

At half past eleven that night a big bearded man in a pale raincoat stood waiting outside Blackfriars Station, a trilby hat pulled down over his eyes and a stick like a shillelagh clutched firmly in his right hand.

A light van pulled up at the kerb before him. The driver leaned out. "Hey, mate. Can you tell us the way to the nearest petrol station?"

"I'll show you."

He got in.

"Where now?" asked Bomber, who was driving.

"Straight across the bridge and down to the Elephant. Then keep up Kennington Road as far as Pomfrey Street."

"Pomfrey Street. Where's that?"

"Don't you know your way around Kennington?"

"I know the main roads south of the river but I don't know much about sidestreets."

"Never mind, I'll tell you where to turn off. We'll be going a fair way round the back-doubles before we get to the place. That's the way Mr. Hazenfeld likes it. That way, we get a chance to see if anybody's tagging us."

"Tony's in the back, he'll keep an eye out. Just so long as you tell me the way, I'll drive it."

They hummed along in silence for about a quarter of an hour.

"Just here. This is Pomfrey Street. Next on the left."

The van turned off the main road and into the narrow street.

"Right here. Now sharp left," said the guide. "Keep straight over the crossroads. Right again and round the square to the second on the left."

Bomber swung the van this way, that way, twisting and turning at his passenger's commands, plunging ever deeper into the bewildering maze of backstreets.

"Blimey!" he said, after twenty minutes' steady manœuvring. "It's a good job your gaffer sent you to meet us. We'd never have stood a chance of finding this place by ourselves. We'd have to have asked a copper. How much farther now?"

"Left here and over the canal. We're nearly there. Pull up just past the next factory on the right."

The van stopped.

"That's the place. Straight down that alley over there. Unload the stuff in front of those sheds in the yard. Then I'll

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take you up to the guvnor. He's in that room with the light on up there." He pointed at the yellow window in the building ahead. "Douse the lights and be as quiet as you can getting there. This is a good spot and the guvnor wants to keep it that way."

Bomber crept the van down into the yard, circled so that the back was to the sheds and the bonnet facing up the alley again. It was deep dark between the surrounding tall buildings and he couldn't see much, so he left the engine gently ticking over. Then he went round to the back and helped unload the boxes.

As he and Tony took the last one out and carried it over to the pile, the bearded man walked to the other side of the van, out of their sight. He took a stone like a cricket ball from his pocket and hurled it through the lighted window ahead. Then he blew three sharp blasts on a whistle.

A figure came to the window and flung it open.

"Hey! You down there. Stay where you are!"

Lights came on all over the building and whistles started blowing everywhere.

"Quick, boys!" cried the guide. "We've been narked. It's the coppers! They're on to us!"

Bomber and Tony dived for the van and, not waiting for their pathfinder, slammed in the clutch and went roaring up the alley and out into the street. The bearded man, with an agility remarkable for his size, scrambled over a wall of the alley into the factory next door and disappeared into the darkness.

At ten o'clock next morning, Father Gregory took Garvey's books up to him.

"Thank you, Father," said the old man, peering warily out from the grey forest of his eyebrows. "When you didn't bring them yesterday, I thought perhaps you might have an objection to fetching books about dogs and gambling and that."

"I thought about dropping your notebook in the canal, just to save you from your own folly," said the priest derisively. "Back the trap with the longest losing sequence! That's your system, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, but—"

"And it's the original mug's game. Except for beer and fist-fighting and other men's wives, there's nothing caused more misery in this parish than numbskulls like you following the longest losing sequence. Believe me, Tom Garvey, it always gets longer."

And he left the old man clutching his books defensively to his chest.

He went back down to the Old Kent Road, and as he passed

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Mayerling's warehouse he saw Jacob and Fenton coming across the yard.

"Good morning to you both. How goes the investigation, Inspector?"

"Splendidly. We've got the furs back, every last piece."

"Then you've caught the thieves?"

"No. They lost their nerve. Thought we were getting too near, no doubt. Decided the load was too hot to handle and gave it up last night. Dumped the lot in the backyard of the police station."

"Well, I never! And did you catch them at it?"

"No. They were away before anyone cottoned on."

"But you'll be hot on their trail, no doubt?"

The detective shrugged wearily.

"When we get time. *If* we ever get time round here. Your parish and my manor's a wicked place, Father. During last night there was a bank blown, a post office raided, and a jeweller's done. So we've got a plateful for a while. And if we caught those boyos that took your furs, Mr. Mayerling, I doubt if any judge would send them down. It's a hell of a good defence to say you've already given the stuff back."

"I'm not pressing anybody, Inspector," said the furrier. "I got my skins back. Especially those black-petals. And I learnt some security lessons from the break-in. Far as I'm concerned you can let it die."

Father Gregory left them and walked back to his church. He sat down at the desk in his office.

"Retribution," he murmured. "Tomorrow I'll see Mollie and Conroy and we'll get on with reformation. A pound a month for a year to Tom Garvey should be about what he can afford without hurting the family."

He sorted through his papers.

"But first let's get this infernal Accommodation Return out of the way. What is the area of the School Hall? The same as last time, I'll write. No, I won't. I'll make it eight hundred yards by five hundred yards. Bigger than St. Peter's itself. Then we'll see if the Bishop ever reads his returns." © Patrick Ryan 1960

UP MEN AND ATOM

The Spacemen of the Atom Age
On their unearthly trips
Will feed their fissile faces on
Atomic fission chips.

G. C. NORMAN

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BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

" One night," said Smith,
" I eyed a peach-melba that drifted by "

BY RAY BRADBURY

THE TWO MEN sat swaying side by side, unspeaking for the long while it took for the train to move through cold December twilight, pausing at one country station after another. As the twelfth depot was left behind, the older of the two men muttered, " Idiot, idiot! " under his breath.

" What? " The younger man glanced up from his paper.

The old man nodded bleakly. " Did you see that damn fool rush off just now, stumbling after that woman who smelt of Chanel? "

" Oh, her? " The young man looked as if he could not decide whether to laugh or be depressed. " I followed her off the train once, myself."

The old man snorted and closed his eyes. " I, too, five years ago."

The young man stared at his companion as if he had found a friend in a most unlikely spot.

" Did—did the same thing happen once you reached the end of the platform? "

" Perhaps. Go on."

" Well, I was twenty feet behind her and closing up fast when her husband drove into the station with a carload of kids! Bang! The car door slammed. I saw her Cheshire-cat smile as she drove away. I waited half an hour, chilled to the bone, for another train. It taught me something, by God! "

" It taught you nothing whatsoever," replied the older man dryly.

" My grandpa once said, ' Big in the hunkus, small in the brain, that is man's fate.' "

" A wise man. But, now, what do you make of *her*? "

" That woman? Oh, she likes to keep in trim. It must pep up her liver to know that with a little mild eye-rolling she can make the lemmings swarm any night on this train. She has the

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best of all possible worlds, don't you think? Husband, children, plus the knowledge she's neat packaging and can prove it five trips a week, hurting no one, least of all herself. And, everything considered, she's not much to look at. It's just she *smells* so good."

"Tripe," said the old man. "It won't wash. Purely and simply, she's a woman. All women are women, all men are dirty goats. Until you accept that, you will be rationalising your glands all your life. As it is, you will know no rest until you are seventy or thereabouts. Meanwhile, self-knowledge may give you whatever solace can be had in a sticky situation. Given all these essential and inescapable truths, few men ever strike a balance. Ask a man if he is happy and he will immediately think you are asking if he is *satisfied*. Satiety is most men's Edenic dream. I have known only one man who came heir to the very best of all possible worlds, as you used the phrase."

"Good lord," said the young man, his eyes shining, "I wouldn't mind hearing about him."

"I hope there's time. This chap is the happiest ram, the most carefree bull in history. Wives and girlfriends galore, as the sales-pitch says. Yet he has no qualms, guilts, no feverish nights of lament and self-chastisement."

"Impossible!" the young man put in. "You can't eat your cake and digest it, too."

"He did, he does, he will! Not a tremor, not a trace of moral seasickness after an all-night journey over a choppy sea of innersprings! Successful businessman. Apartment in New York on the best street, the proper height above traffic; plus a long-weekend Bucks County place on a more than correct little country stream where he herds his nannies, the happy farmer. But I met him first at his New York apartment last year, when he had just married.

"At dinner, his wife was truly gorgeous, snow-cream arms, fruity lips, an amplitude of harvestland below the line, a plenitude above. Honey in the horn, the full apple-barrel through winter, she seemed thus to me *and* her husband who nipped her bicep in passing. Leaving, at midnight, I found myself raising a hand to slap her on the flat of her flank like a thoroughbred. Falling down in the elevator, life floated out from under me. I nickered."

"Your powers of description," said the young commuter, breathing heavily, "are incredible."

"I write advertising copy," said the older. "But, to continue I met Let-Us-Call-Him-Smith again, not two weeks later. Through sheer coincidence I was invited to crash a party by a friend. Arriving in Bucks County, whose place should it turn

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out to be but Smith's! And near him, in the centre of the living-room, stood this dark Italian beauty, all tawny panther, all midnight and moonstones, dressed in earth colours, browns, siennas, tans, umbers, all the tones of a riotously fruitful autumn. In the babble, I lost her name. Later, I saw Smith crush her like a great sunwarmed vine of lush October grapes in his arms.

"Idiot fool, I thought. Lucky dog, I thought. Wife in town, mistress in country. He is 'trampling out the vintage,' et cetera, and all that. Glorious. But I shall not stay for the wine festival, I thought, and slipped away, unnoticed."

"I can't stand too much of this talk," said the young commuter, trying to raise the window.

"Don't interrupt," said the older man. "Where was I?"

"Trampled. Vintage."

"Oh yes! Well, as the party broke up, I finally caught the lovely Italian's name, *Mrs.* Smith!"

"He'd married again, eh?"

"Hardly. Not enough time. Stunned, I thought quickly, He must have two sets of friends. One set knows his city wife. The other set knows this mistress whom he *calls* wife. Smith's too smart for bigamy. No other answer. Mystery."

"Go on, go on," said the young commuter feverishly.

"Smith, in high spirits, drove me to the train station that night. On the way he said, 'What do you think of my wives?'

"'Wives, plural?' I said.

"'Plural, hell,' he said. 'I've had twenty in the last three years! Each better than the last! Twenty, count them, twenty! Here!' As we stopped at the station he pulled out a thick photo-wallet. He glanced at my face as he handed it over, 'No, no,' he laughed, 'I'm not Bluebeard with a score of old theatre trunks in the attic crammed full of former mates. Look!'

"I flipped the pictures. They flew by like an animated film. Blondes, brunettes, redheads, the plain, the exotic, the fabulously impertinent or the sublimely docile gazed out at me, smiling, frowning. The flutter-flicker hypnotised, then haunted me. There was something terribly familiar about each photo.

"'Smith,' I said, 'you must be very rich to afford all these wives.'

"'Not rich, no! Look again!'

"I flipped the montage in my hands. I gasped. I knew.

"'The Mrs. Smith I met tonight, the Italian beauty, is the one and only Mrs. Smith,' I said. 'But at the same time, the woman I met in New York two weeks ago, is also the one and only Mrs. Smith. It can only follow that both women are one and the same!'

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" ' Correct! ' cried Smith, proud of my sleuthing.

" ' Impossible! ' I blurted out.

" ' No,' said Smith, elated. ' My wife is amazing. One of the finest actresses off Broadway when I met her. Selfishly, I asked her to quit the stage on pain of severance of our mutual insanity, our rampaging up one side of a chaise longue and down the other. A giantess made dwarf by love, she slammed the door on the theatre to run down the alley with me. The first six months of our marriage, the earth did not move, it shook.

" ' But, inevitably, fiend that I am, I began to watch various other women ticking by like wondrous pendulums. My wife caught me noting the time. Meanwhile, she had begun to cast her eyes on passing theatrical billboards. I found her nesting with the *New York Times* next-morning reviews, desperately tearful. Crisis! How to combine two violent careers, that of passion-dishevelled actress and that of anxiously rambling ram?

" ' One night,' said Smith, ' I eyed a peach-melba that drifted by. Simultaneously, an old theatre programme blew in the wind and clung to my wife's ankle. It was as if these two events, occurring within the moment, had shot a window blind with a rattling snap clear to the top of its roll. Light *poured* in! My wife seized my arm. Was she or was she not an actress? She was! Well then, well!

" ' She sent me packing for twenty-four hours, wouldn't let me in the apartment as she hurried about some vast and exciting preparations. When I returned home the next afternoon at the blue hour, as the French say in their always twilight language, my wife had vanished! A dark Latin put out her hand to me. " I am a friend of your wife's," she said and threw herself upon me, to nibble my ears, crack my ribs, until I held her off and suddenly suspicious cried, " This is no woman I'm with—this is my *wife!* " And we both fell laughing to the floor.

" ' This *was* my wife, with a different cosmetic, different couturier, different posture and intonation. " My actress! " I said. " Your actress! " she laughed. " Tell me what I should be and I'll be it. Carmen? All right, I'm Carmen. Brünnhilde? Why not? I'll study, create, and when you grow bored, re-create. I'm enrolled at the Dance Academy. I'll learn to sit, stand, walk, ten thousand ways. I'm chin deep in speech lessons, I'm signed at the Berlitz! I am also a member of the Yamayuki Judo Club."

" Good lord," I cried, " what for? "

" This! " she replied, and tossed me head over heels into bed!

" ' Well,' said Smith, ' from that day on I've lived Riley and nine other Irishmen's lives! I've known unnumbered passing fancies, delightful shadow plays of women all colours, shapes,

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sizes, fevers! My wife, finding her proper stage, our parlour, and audience, me! has fulfilled her need to be the greatest actress in the land. Too small an audience? No! For I, with my ever-wandering tastes, am there to meet her, whichever part she plays. My jungle talent coincides with her wide-ranging genius. So caged at last, yet free, loving her I love everyone. It's the best of all possible worlds, friend, the best of all possible worlds.' "

There was a moment of silence.

The train rumbled down the track in the new December darkness.

The two commuters, the young and the old, were thoughtful now, considering the story just finished.

At last the younger man swallowed and nodded in awe.

" Your friend Smith solved his problem all right."

" He did."

The young man debated a moment, then smiled quietly.

" I have a friend, too. His situation was similar, but—different. Shall I call him Quillan? "

" Yes," said the old man, " but hurry. I get off soon."

" Quillan," said the young man quickly, " was in a bar one night with a fabulous redhead. The crowd parted before her like the sea before Moses. Miraculous, I thought, revivifying, beyond the senses!

" A week later in Greenwich I saw Quillan ambling along with a dumpy little woman, his own age, of course, only thirty-two, but she'd gone to seed young. Tatty, the English would say; pudgy, snouty-nosed, not enough make-up, wrinkled stockings, spider's-nest hair, and immensely quiet she was, content to walk along it seemed, just holding Quillan's hand. Ha! I thought, here's his poor little parsnip wife who loves the earth he treads, while other nights he's out winding up that incredible robot redhead! How sad, what a shame. And I went on my way.

" A month later, I met Quillan again. He was about to dart into a dark entranceway in MacDougal Street when he saw me. ' Oh! ' he cried, sweating. ' Don't tell on me! My wife must never know! '

" I was about to swear myself to secrecy when a woman called to Quillan from a window above.

" I glanced up. My jaw dropped.

" There in the window stood the dumpy, seedy little woman!

" So suddenly it was clear. The beautiful redhead was his *wife!* She danced, she sang, she talked loud and long, a brilliant intellectual, goddess, thousand-limbed, the finest throw-pillow ever sewn by mortal hand. Yet she was strangely—tiring.

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" So my friend Quillan had taken this obscure Village room where, two nights a week, he could sit quietly in the mouse-brown silence or walk on the dim streets with this good homely dumpy comfortably mute woman who was not his wife at all, as I had quickly supposed, but his mistress!

" I looked from Quillan to his plump companion in the window above and wrung his hand with new warmth and understanding. ' Mum's the word! ' I said. The last I saw of them, they were seated in a delicatessen, Quillan and his mistress, their eyes gently touching each other, saying nothing, eating pastrami sandwiches. He too had, if you think about it, the best of all possible worlds . . ."

The train roared, shouted its whistle and slowed. Both men, rising, stopped and looked at each other in surprise.

Both spoke at once. " You get off at *this* stop? "

Both nodded, smiling.

Silently they made their way back, and as the train stopped in the chill December night, alighted and shook hands.

" Well, give my best to Mr. Smith."

" And mine to Mr. Quillan! "

Two horns honked from opposite ends of the station. Both men looked at one car. A beautiful woman was in it. Both looked at the other car. A beautiful woman was in it.

They separated, looking back at each other like two schoolboys, each stealing a glance at the car towards which the other was moving.

I wonder, thought the old man, if that woman down there is—?

I wonder, thought the young man, if that lady in his car could be—?

But both were running now. Two car doors slammed like pistol shots ending a matinee.

The cars drove off. The station platform stood empty. It being December, and cold, snow soon fell like a curtain.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Counter-irritant*. 9, *Ladling*. 10, *Glacier*. 11, *Ogres*. 12, *Lithesome*. 13, *Spoor*. 14, *Turbulent*. 17, *Slow-worms*. 19, *Power*. 21, *Intitules*. 24, *Pants*. 26, *Ill will*. 27, *All-star*. 28, *News from Tartary*.

Down. 1, *Cello*. 2, *Undergo*. 3, *Twin-screw*. 4, *Regulator*. 5, *Right*. 6, *Image*. 7, *Adipose*. 8, *Tormentor*. 13, *Suspicion*. 15, *Resistant*. 16, *Unpopular*. 18, *Outflow*. 20, *Want tea*. 22, *Thief*. 23, *Lollo*. 25, *Surly*.

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CARNIVAL NIGHT

Oh, it was a masterpiece,
no question!

BY EDITH PARGETER

YOU could tell as soon as this thing came round the corner off the estate, and the folks down there got their first look at it, that it was going to be the kingpin. You could hear the yell of joy the kids let out right up to the top of the street, where I was sitting on the wall of Bray's yard alongside Joe, with his bull-terrier up between us.

That dog always had to be in whatever was going on, talk about inquisitive! He couldn't wait for the wagon to come up the street, he started to whine for it as soon as he heard the squealing and laughing down the bottom end. It was like playtime at the primary school. The women were going, "Oooooohh!" and, "Eeeeeeh!" up the scale till it would have split your eardrums, like they do for the off-colour jokes at a seaside show, and the kids were shouting and screaming fit to bust.

Joe says, "Sounds as if they've got a real good un this time."

Everybody started craning to see before the lorry was anywhere near. Nobody was giving a glance to the Mothers' Union's mock-up of The Archers, and it was a pity, really, because you could have cracked a few ribs on that lot. Nor to the English Rose dance troupe nipping it up in their little pink flatties and flapping their little pink nylon paws like mad. Nor to the Boys' Brigade band sharpening up their march tempo into a K.S.L.I. canter to get closer to the girls.

Paddy Ross had his old lorry out as usual, with the pirate ship that's been going the rounds of all the local carnivals for years, but that wasn't what was raising the riot; and the Miners' Arms customers had done a lovely job of a comic pit-head baths on the big N.C.B. haulage wagon, but that wasn't the one, either.

It was a smaller lorry coming up behind that was getting 'em. The noise ran alongside it all up the street, and noise was what we got first from the gadget itself, a lovely low-pitched whining purr like a happy tiger, but punctuated here and there by a few other noises, too, a hissing and a crackling, a dotted peep, like a marker buoy on a shoal.

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The first we actually saw of it, head on before it came alongside, you couldn't tell it was an ordinary lorry at all, they had it so well camouflaged. There was what you might call a cab, all right, but it looked like a sort of fancy cockpit, and all the bonnet was shelled in with aluminium plating or something made to look like it, nicely shaved off for streamlining; and the streamed plating came down so low it nearly touched the ground, hiding the wheels altogether.

When it came nearly abreast of us we could see a sort of comet-shaped body that curved off from the cockpit and tapered away to a finned tail, and a lot of odd valves and vents that went along its sides like scales, and a kind of gauge amidships that ran a thread of metallic green liquid up a graded tube like mercury in a thermometer. There was a thin antenna shaking like a live thing on top of the cab, and a plastic globe some way back, and a few other mysterious whatnots that you couldn't call anything in particular because there was nothing they really looked like except themselves. Oh, it was a masterpiece, no question.

There were two fellows in the cab, you could just see their heads and shoulders. They were got up something weird, with horned helmets, and blue plastic over their faces, and antennæ on the horns of the helmets, too, and close-fitting black overalls, one-piecers got up to look like spacesuits.

Then there was a third lad who kept popping up in the globe behind them and doing things with little instruments there, and every time he touched something the oddest things happened. One time it would be a jet of steam that shot out of one of the valves, another time there'd be a bang like a gun going off, or a red light would come on at the tip of the tail fin, or a shower of sparks would shoot out of the end of the antenna. You never knew what was going to happen next. He was doing his tricks nineteen to the dozen, and every time he let off another fizzer the women would yodel and the kids would shriek and dance up and down and near kill themselves laughing.

Joe's dog got an eyeful of this lark, and started to bark like mad, and fell off the wall; he always tended to propel himself backwards when he let fly, and when excited he was liable to forget he wasn't on the ground. He near bust something in his hurry to scramble up again before the thing got past.

But the best of all was the way those three blokes were playing it up, dead serious and businesslike with the machine, but pleased and excited at the reception the crowd was giving them. They'd look at their gauges and switches and valves with such loving care, and then when they had a minute to spare they'd lean out and grin and wave back at the kids, and carry on as pleased as

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Punch. And when the folks howled with delight at one of the bangs the young chap at the back would give 'em a stream of green sparks as an encore.

Laugh, I thought Joe would have done himself an injury, and the women were wiping the tears away. I tell you, that was the best tableau we ever had at our carnival, and we've had some champions in our time.

"Who on earth cooked up that contraption?" Joe says when he got his breath back.

"Dunno," I said, "but whoever it is, they're not competing, there's no name or number on it, or anything."

"Competing?" says Joe. "They wouldn't spoil a thing like that by sticking a comic name on it, man; they're artists, that's what they are. What's a prize to men of that calibre? They know their worth."

And he lets out a yell as a blue flash shot out of one of the vents, and after a minute struck speechless with laughing he says, "It'll be the R.E.M.E. lads from the ordnance depot, I bet you. Who else has the means and the know-how to concoct a whizzer like that? Those boys'll do anything and go anywhere for laughs. Shut up!" he says to the bull-terrier, who was getting shriller than the women. "I can't hear the bangers for your blating."

We slid off the wall as soon as it was past, and joined on with the rest of the folks following the procession out to the carnival fields. We could hear the fair organ going before we were past the crossroads. The contraption ambled along gaily, spitting and flashing and shooting away like a royal salute and a firework display all in one, and the three merry men were getting gayer and gayer, and showing off their Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineering skill like nobody's business; and by that time they had so many kids trotting after them they looked like a new sort of Pied Piper into the bargain.

Well, when the procession reached the field, and all the tableaux and the groups and the jazz bands and the dance troupes were drawn up for the judges, I saw Councillor Biggs, who's chairman of the carnival committee, conferring with the judges and grinning to himself, and shaking his head over the contraption as if he still couldn't believe it. Then he comes over to the three lads who'd brought it. They were out on the grass by that time, stretching their legs; one was maybe fortyish, short and brown and bandy, and the other two were big lads with cropped fair hair and healthy grins on them.

You couldn't see 'em for kids from the waist down. The little uns wanted to see what the helmets were like, with all that fancy stuff on them. One of the fellows obligingly took his off

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and put it on one of the nippers, and then he somehow made one little spark hop out of the left antenna, and the kid nearly took off for outer space on the spot, he was so overcome with excitement. They were talking, too, but some lovely gibberish they made up as they went along; the kids' jaws were hanging and their eyebrows were in their hair, they were so fascinated.

Oh, they were a treat, those chaps! You couldn't fault 'em on a single detail, and you couldn't catch 'em out. When they put on a show it really was a show, down to the last button.

Well, then, old Biggs goes up to 'em, and he says, " Boys, you know you really should have entered that interstellar flitoscope of yours in one of the main classes, you'd have walked off with the first prize, easy."

They all three looked at him, grinning but mystified, and the oldest one comes out with a lovely line in gibberish, very polite and friendly, sure-you-mean-it-kindly-whatever-it-is-but-no-savvy, you know. His smile was an open book in any language you care to name.

I thought old Biggs would have split his ribs, laughing. He bangs the nearest young fellow on the back, and the plastic stuff he was wearing makes a sort of musical noise like twanging an elastic.

" You're a masterpiece, lads, that's what you are," says Biggs, wheezing away like a grampus. " You kill me! I tell you what I'm going to do, I'm going to award you a special prize off my own bat. I like a bit of enterprise, and I'm all for thoroughness. Here, boys, you spend that round the fair, and enjoy yourselves."

And blow me, he outs with a five-pound note and planks it into the older chap's hand, and staggers away mopping his eyes and still quaking.

I watched to see how they'd deal with this one, and I wasn't the only one watching, but they weren't foxed, not for a minute. They all three stood turning the note in their hands and looking at it back and front, as curious as monkeys, as though they'd never seen one before. So some of us thought we'd give as good entertainment as we were getting, and we moved in and made signs to them to come along with us into the fun fair.

We took them gently up to old Gertie in the paybox of the dodgems, and got her to change the note for them, and then we took them round the sideshows, having a bash at this and a ride on that all the afternoon.

I've never had so much fun at a fair since I was a kid, and all the sideshows were real space fiction to me. I did things I haven't done for years, just to see those boys acting up as though they

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were riding on the Mont Blanc for the first time, and taking their first crack at coconuts. They should have been on the stage, and that's a fact. You ought to have seen their innocent wonder at the rum things that went on in the Noah's Ark, and their excitement and delight when they once got the hang of all this lovely nonsense. Once they had it there was no holding them.

They didn't miss a thing on that field, not even the candy-floss; and to my knowledge they went on the dodgems five times, and on the caterpillar three times. But even when they were bashed across the floor backwards by young Bill Brady, who drives on the dodgems like he does on the road, they didn't forget themselves and yell in English, not they. I hung around with them all day and they never put a foot wrong. Everybody had a go at them, it got to be a game trying to catch them out, but nothing doing. You'd have had to get up early in the morning to get a rise out of those three types, I'm telling you.

Any other carnival night I should have gone home pretty early and called it a day, but this one was a day and a half.

Three or four of us took them along at opening time to The Black Boar, solemn as judges, and set up the drinks and got some cheese sandwiches out of Jenny. Would you believe it, those boys still kept it up, letting on they were tasting beer for the first time, on top of everything else. For beginners, they took to it like ducks to water. You should have seen their eyes sparkle when they poured down that first pint of draught.

And darts—what were those? They'd never set eyes on a board in their lives, but they didn't half pick it up quick. One hour and three beers after they started, the little bandy fellow was playing Sam Braddick round the clock so fast and accurate you'd have thought that was how he spent all his evenings.

It must have been well turned nine o'clock when one of the young ones suddenly pulls out a little gadget from his overall pocket, a thing like a light-meter or something of that kind, and looks at it, and nudges his pals, and in his deadpan way says, "Eh, look at the time!" or words to that effect. And the older one makes motions to us, polite-like, excuse us for a few minutes, and they go into a huddle.

Then one of the boys puts his helmet on, and touches up a button or two, and the antennæ start to quiver and spark. With one finger he touches out the sparks, while the other two watch him and chatter at him, laughing and making suggestions, and looking as happy as sandboys.

It all reminded me so much of three lads on the spree writing a postcard home that I leaned up against the bar and made believe to be translating as the sparks crackled.

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" Having a wonderful time. This is a smashing place. Wish you were here. Back for tea, seven light-years from now."

We were all trying to get into the act by that time. What with the free flow of beer and the general gaiety, I was about ready for anything.

Then off came the helmet again, and they were back at the bar like ferrets after a rabbit. The older one makes expansive gestures round the whole lot of us, and pulls out all he had left of the five-pound note old Biggs gave him. It wasn't much by then, not half enough to set 'em up all round, which was plainly what he intended. He soon learnt that one.

" Sorry, lad," said Jenny, smiling at him proper motherly, and giggling because she still thought he was a card, " but it won't run to it. One, two, three, maybe four, see? But not the lot. Can't do it."

He looked back at her hopefully, and never moved a muscle to let on that he understood a word. His face was brown as chestnuts, this chap, and now I came to look at him, his ears were a funny shape, narrow and pointed.

" Sorry," said Jenny, shaking her head vigorously. " Not enough—get it? Too little! "

He got it. He slipped a hand back in his pocket, and pulled out a coin and slapped it on the bar. Only it wasn't a coin, or if it was it was a foreign one. It looked like an old campaign medal or something like that.

George came along behind the bar and picked it up, and he looked at the three types all looking back at him with their trusting, well-intentioned smiles, and he was fair shaking with laughing. You couldn't help it, they were marvellous. After the beer they'd put away it was a miracle they could still keep control of their faces like that.

" You boys are a cure," he says, his chins all wobbling like a three-tier jelly. " Set 'em up all round, Jenny, they're on the house. I'll keep this as a souvenir, mate—something to remember you by. And by gum, I shall remember you, too."

So we drank to the next time, because by then this time was getting along to its last hour. It was a good hour, though, and we didn't leave until The Black Boar closed at eleven. They had an extension, being carnival night.

I went back to the field with the lads to see 'em off. If they were only going back to the ordnance depot it wasn't so far, but I just wanted to see 'em start up, and make sure they were capable of getting home safely. Me, that was half-seas-over myself! But I meant well. I liked those three, they were the real whole-hogging kind.

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We went down the road all four abreast with our arms round one another, singing two separate songs, me in plain English, them in Venusian or carnivalese or whatever you like to call it. The young uns had a coconut each, and the little un had a golliwog he'd won at the fair, shooting clay pipes, and they were all as happy as piglings in clover, and so was I.

The fair had closed down by the time we got there, the lights were gradually going out, and all the decorated lorries had gone, except their space special. It was dead quiet, nobody stirring but us. They climbed into their contraption, and waved to me and grinned as they started her up. And I waved back until they were out of sight. And that was the end of the best carnival we ever had.

Except that about a week later I ran into Councillor Biggs in the market, and he grabs me by the arm and takes me on one side, looking very serious.

"Tom," he says, "about that spaceship, or whatever it was—that thing that made the big hit at the carnival. You were with those three lads most of the evening, weren't you?"

"I was that," I said, "it was the best night out I've had for years."

"And they never let slip where they were from?" he says.

"No," I said, "but we weren't much bothered. Why? What's on your mind?"

"Just this," he says. "I was talking to that R.E.M.E. major two days ago at the school open day, and I said to him, 'That was a great show your boys gave us at the carnival.' 'Not ours, old boy,' he says, 'none of ours were out that day, I should have known if they'd been planning a do like that. No, that was those G.P.O. engineers from the weather station at Bondheath, I thought you'd have guessed.' Well, just to be sure this time, I phoned the station. All they said was, 'Not us, lad, or we'd have charged you for the juice. Try the R.A.F. cadets, it sounds like them.' And I tried 'em, but it wasn't them.

"Tom," he says, breathing heavily in my ear, "*it wasn't anybody*. And, Tom, I've just been talking to George Morgan. He showed me that coin the little fellow turned out of his pocket. It's metal, but it's no metal I've ever seen." And he hauls off and looks at me very solemn indeed.

"Did you see 'em off? Did you see which way they went?"

"Sure I saw it," I said. "For Pete's sake, there's only one way to go from the field, isn't there? They just got in and started her up and went. You think I was still in sight when they got to the crossroads?"

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"No, I suppose not," he said, very uneasy. "But I wish I knew who'd been pulling our legs, all the same."

"If you ask me," I said soothingly, "that's the sort of elaborate joke the science students from the Tech. must have had a hand in. I shouldn't look any farther if I was you."

And he went off more than half convinced. I hope! Anyhow, I've heard no more about it, so I take it he's given up worrying.

I didn't actually tell him any lies. It just came over me, remembering what I remembered, how different it can be dealing with ordinary folks like us at The Black Boar, and getting mixed up with authority, even as high as the Borough Council. Say you're markedly different and you drop in on our local carnival—you come with goodwill, goodwill is what you'll meet. But once let the authorities get wind how very different you are, and all they'll think of doing is pointing a gun at you. Better if they don't get wind of it, that's what I thought. Just in case those three boys ever want to pop in again for a quiet game and a pint.

So that's why I only told him half a tale. They got in and started her up and went.

Well, so they did. Vertically. That little ship took her nose off the ground and snuffed the air towards the moon, and took off like a bird. A pretty awkward bird at first, say an elderly swan; she just about got over the hedge, and she lurched a bit just for a minute, what with all that draught beer. But then she got her head towards home, and straightened out into speed, and vanished like a silver flash in the direction of Orion . . .

I'd like to see those boys again, but in a way I hope they never do come back; our reputation's safer that way. Right now there must be one place at least in the galaxy where they think well of Earth; it would be a pity if they ever got to know us better.

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ACTIVE SERVICE

Church attendance was an inflexible rule for the whole Mitford family. Every Sunday morning, rain or shine, we stumped off down the hill with Nanny, governess, Miranda, several dogs, Boud's goat, Enid, her pet snake, and my pet dove. Some of the graves in Swinbrook churchyard were conveniently surrounded by high railings for better preservation and privacy. These made good cages for the assorted animals, whose loud yelps, cooing and baaing blended nicely with the lusty voices of the village choir and effectively drowned out most of the ten-minute sermon.

JESSICA MITFORD, *Hons and Rebels*

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THE FEATHER

It was stuck jauntily in his breast-pocket

BY WALLACE CRAWFORD

"HILDA," he called out irritably, "is anyone coming? Are you expecting visitors?"

His hat still in his hand, he stood in the hall with his head raised and his eye cocked up the staircase as if he was waiting for something to happen. A feeble croak came from one of the darkened rooms upstairs, and when he heard it a dark flush of exasperation spread across his square features.

"Hilda, did you hear me?"

"Yes, Harold, and there's no need to shout. You'll wake Auntie." The voice came from the room on his right.

"Well, why don't you answer my question?"

"I was just finishing a row. Nobody's coming."

"In that case, I'll switch off the hall light." The mock lantern suspended from the ceiling ceased to be. Economy had ruled their lives for years; economy against the day when the old woman upstairs should die and they would be able to live the lives of the free again.

He entered the sitting-room. His wife was sitting by a very small coal fire, knitting with quick uneven movements which threw into confusion the stuffy timelessness of the room, with its heavy furniture and thick curtains. She was a slight woman nearing fifty, thin and a trifle stringy. Her hair, dressed in small ridiculous curls round her small head, was dyed to hide the grey. She wore shiny nylon stockings from the local multiple stores. She tried ineffectually to look less than her years, and this, without his being aware of it, added to his basic dissatisfaction with life. Once the jerky precision of her movements had been informed with grace, and he had fallen in love with her.

"Did you have a heavy day?" she asked. If she forgot to ask this, the answer would be thrust at her later.

"Not too bad," he said, mollified. He worked for merchant bankers in the City, where during forty years he had become well qualified in the art of not overdoing it. He was a big man, thick-set, and he talked a lot; he talked in the office and on the train. Some people avoided him. But for all his impressive appearance,

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he was a man of little resolution. He needed pushing to the step which would make all the difference.

She watched him covertly as she knitted. Although it was cold he sweated slightly, and she knew that when he sweated he was trying to make up his mind to do something.

He went to the corner of the room and switched on the radio. " Get the six o'clock news," he said, and coming to the hearth stood, drumming his fingers on the chimneypiece, waiting for the set to warm up.

She finished her row, put by the wool. " I'll put the kettle on."

" Wait a minute." He stalked over to the set, switched it off again, and faced her. " How is the old woman? "

" You mean Aunt Judy? "

" Of course I mean Aunt Judy."

She made a gesture of futility. " The doctor came today."

" I know the doctor came today. That's why I ask you. You might ring me at the office and tell me what he says."

" There's nothing to tell. Just the same." She got up, turning towards the door. " Let me put the kettle on."

" No. What did he say? Tell me."

She answered with her face turned to the door. " He said it might be tomorrow and it might be in six months' time. It's impossible to tell in these cases."

" He said that a month ago." His eyes were dark with venom. " He said it *six* months ago."

" I know." Her head cocked over her shoulder, she watched him as he paced restlessly about the small room. " What can you do about it? He's the doctor."

" He must know something more definite than that."

" If he did, I don't suppose he'd tell us." She paused by the door. " What's the good of upsetting yourself about it? "

" I'm not upsetting myself."

They had reached the usual impasse, and talking was a waste of time. " I'll put the kettle on," she said, and disappeared.

Left to himself, he switched the set on again, hearing the news with vague attention. They were reading an obituary notice. " He was a man of quick decisions," said the announcer surprisingly. " He always knew exactly when to act. He did not choose the moment, he saw the moment when it arrived. During the Party crisis of 1931, when a split threatened, he . . ."

Harold turned off the set and went to the door of the room, peering up the dark staircase. He felt rather than heard the curious noise which was someone breathing in the room above. He climbed the stairs and entered the sick-room, switching on the light.

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Aunt Judy lay stretched on her big brass bed, the one she had brought with her fifteen years ago. In her younger days the bed might have struck a note of modest affluence, but now it looked like something out of a third-rate seaside boarding house. The room was at once chilly and stuffy, for the single-bar electric fire gave little warmth and ate up the air.

The old woman was watching as he came to the bed, her eyes alive with a light of recognition. One side of her body was paralysed. She had to be fed and ministered to in every way. Hilda did most of it. Occasionally, at weekends, he gave a hand.

"How are we, Auntie?" he said, giving her a big smile. His square-cut features, still handsome, could carry a remarkably ready smile, a heart-warming smile, whenever he chose to turn it on.

She emitted a feeble croak. It was her sole mode of utterance, but it had two tones, the first high-pitched with a whine to it, and the second low and angrily sharp. The first meant acceptance and the second negation, usually irritable negation. Over the years Harold and Hilda had come to know them. Now she was accepting him. He smoothed the pillow and taking the towel at hand wiped the saliva away from her lips.

Then he stared down at her, the smile still on his face. Fifteen years, he thought, and for the first five she had made their life hell. An ageing woman who had been used to ruling her roost; but they had stuck it because of the money.

Then she had been stricken with this paralysis, and he had seen the relief within himself reflected on the face of his wife. But as it turned out, their last state was worse than their first, for this helpless cripple on the bed demanded all their time and all their attention, and demanded not with the promise of money but in the name of humanity. Before, it had been possible to get out occasionally and to curse her behind her back. Now, they were tied to the house and in common decency had to restrain the expression of their thoughts, and this set a sort of barrier between them. To put her in a home would, under the terms of the trust, mean losing the money.

Staring down at her, it occurred to him once again that she was like someone he knew, but as usual he could not place who it was. Her eyes were bright with comprehension, and he had an uneasy sense that she could read his thoughts. What were his thoughts? He did not know. He touched her pillow uncertainly, then smoothed it again. He went to the head of the stairs.

"Hilda," he called. "Come and help me with Auntie's pillows. She looks uncomfortable."

"In a minute. I'm just turning the gas down."

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She came up the stairs, muttering about his dinner. He led the way back to the bedroom.

"I'll hold her head," he said, "while you fluff up the pillows."

She looked at him with surprise. They had done it so often together. Why did he talk? He raised the still head, gently, while Hilda extracted the pillows and pummelled at them. When she had finished one he lowered the old lady flat to the mattress, and picked the pillow up. Absently, with his eyes watching Hilda, he dropped it gently on the staring face.

"You know," he remarked conversationally, ignoring the stifled grunt beneath the pillow, "I wonder if she would be more comfortable on a spring mattress."

They still kept up the fiction about caring for her comfort.

"I don't know," said Hilda doubtfully, smoothing out the second pillow, "she always swore by a feather mattress."

It was the stock reply. Then she saw.

"Harold!" she shrieked.

"What's up? Oh, my God!" He snatched the pillow away. "What on earth could I have been thinking of?"

He leaned over the flushed face, saw the virulent eyes still very much alive. "Auntie, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. I've had a heavy day at the office."

They replaced the pillows, and he slipped quietly from the room.

Downstairs, eating dinner, he did not look at his wife. There was little between them; only the necessity to keep the household going to sustain the cripple upstairs bound them together. He ate his food stolidly, thick stuff, pudding and meat, much the same as he had eaten at lunch.

"I could do with something tasty," he said, wiping his mouth.

"Harold," she expostulated, "you always say—"

"I know what I always say. Plain, home food is the best. But sometimes—"

"Sometimes what?" she demanded resentfully.

"Well, just sometimes I fancy something—well, something fancy. Smoked salmon or caviare, or something like that."

"What do you want with caviare?"

"I don't mean necessarily caviare itself. I mean the things that go with it. Little luxuries. Not ostentatious. That sort of life."

She did not reply. She stared moodily at the stewed apples, then began to ladle them out.

"I thought you were satisfied with your life," she said at last. "I know Aunt Judy irks you but, after all, she can't—"

"Hilda," he interrupted, dropping his voice as if afraid that

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someone upstairs might hear, "how much is that money worth now?"

"You know, we checked it last April."

"How much?" he persisted.

"About twenty thousand."

"Twenty thousand!" he repeated, and began to throw large spoonfuls of stewed apple down his throat. Always he ate voraciously, with even, greedy movements, without regard for those present. Now he finished the fruit in a few huge mouthfuls.

He sighed heavily. "Twenty thousand! If it was free, we could re-invest it. With the market rising, it would be worth a good deal more in a year. Just think what we could do with twenty thousand. Move away from this dump. Live in the country. Real country. Have lunch out every day."

She stood up to clear the dishes away.

"It was a near thing with the old girl, just now," he said.

"How do you mean?" She stared at him.

"Lucky you saw that pillow when you did. Another minute, and—" He waved his hand. "It can happen in a moment, you know. There's no strength in the lung muscles. How can there be?"

She listened, fascinated, as he went on, "And the amazing thing is that it would have been just an accident. Nobody could have blamed us. For that matter, nobody would have known." He stood up. "I'll put the radio on. Bring the tea in there when you've washed up." Then, at the door, he paused. "I think I'll ring you up tomorrow, just to see how she is."

"You mean from the office?"

"Yes."

When he rang up at four the following afternoon, she had no idea what she should say to him.

"Well, how is she?" he said, his voice more peremptory than ever over the telephone.

What did he want of her? she thought. What should she do? All night she had been sleepless, staring at the dim ceiling, while he snored at her side. What was he telling her? Her mind refused to take it in.

"What is it, Hilda? Can't you hear me?"

With a start, she concentrated on what he had said. "Aunt Judy?" she whispered.

"Of course, Aunt Judy. How is she?"

"Just the same. She slept all day. I've fed her."

"Have you changed her pillows? Shaken them up?"

"No. No, I haven't done that."

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" Well, I should if I were you. Before I come home."

He rang off . . .

When he came home a couple of hours later, she met him at the door.

" I think she's dead. She went to sleep after you phoned, and I think she died in her sleep." Hilda spoke quickly, as if to get it out of herself. She avoided his eyes.

He bounded up the stairs. As he entered the bedroom, he pulled a feather from his breast-pocket.

" Where did you get that? " she whispered, as he approached the small shrunken figure on the bed.

" It's been knocking about the office for years," he replied laconically.

" Why did you bring it home? "

" I thought it might be useful."

" You thought it might be useful? " she repeated.

" Yes." He applied the feather to the still mouth. " Not a breath. You're right." He paused and smiled cheerfully. " Ah well, it had to come."

She made the slightest gesture of recoil from him, and he saw it. His cheerful smile faded and he glanced at her with open distaste. She went downstairs to ring for the doctor.

Things went through without a hitch. The doctor had no doubts; he had been expecting it for years.

Harold sold the house and they moved to the outskirts of a pleasant little town about thirty miles from London. It was near enough for Harold to get to the City every day, and far enough for retirement. As he said, they couldn't have chosen better. He had chosen it himself.

The next five years were rather jolly for Harold. He seemed to slough off approaching age and to blossom in the new environment. He became active socially and joined a drinking club in the town. This place had recently opened and the manageress was a handsome woman of forty who had got her job because she knew how to handle men. She had hard eyes but plenty of flesh, and her full lips smiled incessantly. Harold spent a great deal of time at the club.

Under the beneficent smile of Mrs. Clara Brownlee, his eyes sparkled and his tongue was more active than ever. She would listen to him with avid interest. When he left the club at night, outside in the sweet, fresh air, he took deep breaths and expanded his chest enormously.

Hilda made one or two new friends in the town, women who were not slow to drop a hint about Mrs. Brownlee. The change of air did not suit her and she often seemed in poor health.

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While Harold was at the club she would wander disconsolately about the new house. When she sat down she would get up again almost immediately and finger objects in a listless fashion. When he came home she had his meal ready and she gave him appealing glances which he either ignored or did not see, for they called forth no response. He made no attempt to introduce her to the club, although he did mention one evening that women were rarely seen there.

One thing irked her almost to madness.

The feather Harold had brought from the office on the day Aunt Judy died now stood in a chromium flower-vase on the tallboy in his bedroom. When she first saw it, she was so indignant that she plucked it from the vase and flung it in the dustbin. The next day it was back in the same place.

Harold had retrieved it.

She summoned up all her courage and spoke to him. "Why do you keep that beastly thing?" she demanded, her thin face twitching.

"You never know," he replied easily. "It might come in useful again one day.

She searched his eyes for sympathy. "You know," she said, "Aunt Judy really *did* die in her sleep."

"Of course. I never doubted it. How else would she die?"

Harold retired from his position in the City when they had lived in the new house for five years. A fortnight before this event she took the feather and buried it in the garden, and for a month her mind rested. Then, a few days after his retirement, he took the new car he had bought and went into the country alone. He came back with a feather which was almost identical with the one she had buried.

Hilda cried secretly, leaning against the tallboy and staring at the feather and sobbing with deep, painful sobs which were almost noiseless. At such times she would feel a tightness spread across her body as if she would never move again. It was with an effort that she roused her sluggish limbs and left the bedroom to prepare a meal.

Meanwhile Aunt Judy's money appreciated considerably and Harold was a man of some wealth. He talked of going into partnership at the club, and spent more time than ever down there

He came home late one night, very late, and found his wife sitting on a chair in the kitchen, her limbs rigid.

"I did not kill Aunt Judy," she cried as he entered the room, and then her face became still. Only her eyes watched him, alive with horror.

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Harold called the doctor, the doctor brought a nurse, and they carried her to the bedroom. When the morning light came she was still and silent, but she was alive. The doctor said the final seizure might come any day. On the other hand, he suggested, it might be months, even years.

Harold's face became thoughtful. While the nurse was asleep he brought the feather in its vase from the tallboy and placed the vase on the windowsill, directly intercepting the light.

The days passed and age came swiftly upon her. Not that she really changed in appearance but, in the clean still bedroom, under the white sheets, she seemed more and more like a little and very old woman. Harold would stand by the side of the bed, staring at her, forgetting to smile, pursing his lips.

"I could never make out who it was Aunt Judy reminded me of," he said one morning. "I've got it now. It was you."

The nurse was installed in the house and Harold spent a great deal of time out. If he stayed at home, Mrs. Brownlee usually paid a visit. She and Harold would stand by the bed looking down at her, and Hilda could see the speculation in their eyes. They would go down the staircase together, and she would hear them talking and laughing in the rooms below. Her rooms! Then they would go out in the car, very much together, and in the loneliness they left Hilda's heart would contract with grief-stricken apprehension.

He came one morning with Mrs. Brownlee at his side and, while the woman stood staring down at Hilda, he opened the window so that the feather wavered gently in the summer breeze. "Get the stuffiness out of the room," he said cheerfully, watching her eyes flicker at the movement of the feather. Then he left the room with his woman.

But a few moments later he came upstairs again, and alone. Hilda heard a purpose in his steps as he approached, and she closed her eyes to shut out the terror. She heard him go to the window and shut it. She opened her eyes and saw what she expected. The feather was stuck jauntily in his breast-pocket. His hand reached down and touched the pillow. Actually, she was dead before the pillow touched her face.

There were no difficulties, and six months later he married Mrs. Brownlee. He was slavishly in love with her fleshy exuberance, and he thoroughly enjoyed himself. But one thing irritated him. His new wife placed the feather in its vase on the mantelpiece in their sitting-room, and would stand looking at it with a sly grin on her face.

But Harold was no longer a young man, or even middle-aged,

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and one day he realised that the virility of which he was so proud was beginning to fail him. There came an evening when his wife stood before the looking-glass patting her hair into shape, while he slumped, tired and listless, in the armchair. The side of his face twitched.

"I shall go down to the club," she said, gaily blowing on the feather so that it danced in its vase. "I must see a bit of life. As a matter of fact," she added, picking up the feather and twirling it between her fingers, "I wish I'd never left the place. It's pretty dead-alive up here." She replaced the feather, and a few moments later he heard her starting the car.

When she had gone he rose to his feet, took the feather from its vase, and flung it in the dustbin. He went wearily to bed. His wife came home very late.

In the morning she retrieved the feather and said that if he ever did a thing like that again she would slap his face—and that, perhaps, would stop it twitching. She placed the feather back in the vase, blew on it cheerfully, then gave him her sly, evil grin as he slumped in the armchair.

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ALLHALLOWS' EVE

Bones, you have had your heyday,
Sleek in a silken skin—
What need to go parading now,
What use to dance again,
Scaring old tramps and children
With your poor, naked grin?

Soul, you can do little worse,
If visit here you will,
Then cast across a doorway
The shadow of a chill.
Immortal lack of substance knows
But precious little skill.

Stay home tonight from haunting,
Since men to men now are
More ghostlike than the ghostly,
And feel that breath all year
That once blew on Allhallows'
In the innocence of fear.

ADRIENNE CECILE RICH

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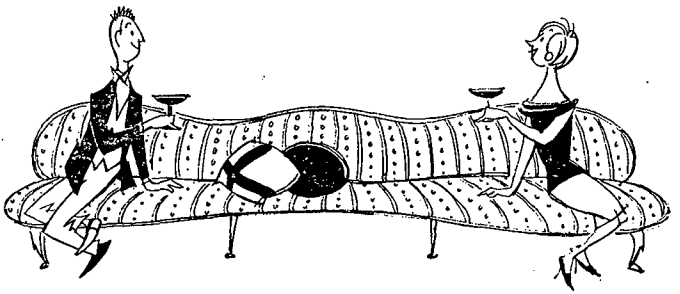

SEDUCTIVE GRAPE

Candy
Is dandy
But liquor
Is quicker.

OGDEN NASH, *Reflections on Ice-breaking*

Open To Dote

" I've been dining," she said grandly.

Jane glanced at her, suddenly maternal.

" Dining, have you? Where? "

" Frascatti's." It was a name she had seen recently in the papers, and was a good name, she thought . . .

" We had *tarble dote*," she said.

" What's that? "

" It's a kind of fish. Done up with trimmings and a yellow sauce."

" Well, I never heard of it. What did you have after that? "

" Then we had a partridge. Roast. With chip potatoes."

" Lucky girl! " said Jane. " Anything else? "

" Well, I didn't want much else," said Lily. " I sat back and sipped my wine."

" Oh, did you? What about your friend? "

" He had some caviare. And after that he had a plate of olives and some port wine. I took a caramel."

" What's that? "

" It's a kind of cocktail."

" Lily! " said Jane, shocked at last, for every reader of the *Sunday Gazette* knew that a cocktail was the beginning of the end. " Well, you won't want any supper—that's one thing."

A. P. HERBERT, *The Water Gipsies*

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Dinner Ken!

There was a young lady of Kent,
Who said that she knew what it meant
When men asked her to dine,
Gave her cocktails and wine,
She knew what it meant—but she went.

ANON

Alarm Signal

The fleet put out to sea, Aphrodite sent a favouring breeze, and Paris soon reached Sparta, where Menelaus feasted him for nine days. At the banquet, Paris presented Helen with the gifts that he had brought from Troy; and his shameless glances, loud sighs and bold signals caused her considerable embarrassment. Picking up her goblet he would set his lips to that part of the rim from which she had drunk; and once she found the words "I love you, Helen!" traced in wine on the table top.

ROBERT GRAVES, *Greek Myths*

Straws Show . . .

The prettiest girl
That ever I saw,
Was sucking cider
Through a straw.

I told that gal
I didn't see how
She sucked the cider
Through a straw.

And cheek by cheek
And jaw by jaw
We sucked that cider
Through that straw.

And all at once
That straw did slip;
I sucked some cider
From her lip.

And now I've got
Me a mother-in-law
From sucking cider
Through a straw.

American Ballad

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Madeira By Far

Then there flashed through her mind what her mother had said
With her ante-penultimate breath
" Oh my child, should you look on the wine when it's red
Be prepared for a fate worse than death! "
She let go her glass with a shrill little cry—
Crash! Tinkle—it fell to the floor;
When he asked: " What in Heaven? " She made no reply
Up her mind and a dash for the door!

Have some Madeira, M'dear!
Rang out down the hall loud and clear,
A tremulous cry that was filled with despair
As she paused to take breath in the cool midnight air,
Have some Madeira, M'dear!
The words seemed to ring in her ear . . .

Until the next morning she woke up in bed
With a smile on her lips and an ache in her head—
And a beard on her pillow that tickled and said,
Have some Madeira, M'dear!

MICHAEL FLANDERS, *Madeira, M'dear?*

Palmed Off

She took a sip of white wine.

" It's deliciously cold," she said. " Let's try yours." She sipped it and made a wry face. " It's bitter," she said.

" It'll taste sweet now you've put your lips to it," Dick said.

" You're flirting with me," she said delightedly.

" I'm a very sincere young man," he said. He took her hand and kissed the palm, then closed her finger gently. " That's a present to prove it."

And so, later on when all the lights but one pink table-lamp had been turned off, he found himself kissing her, very gently, and stroking her long yellow hair as Hubert at the white baby grand played *Mood Indigo*. It was incredible to believe now that he could have been taken in so easily by that pinchbeck set of circumstances—wine, a pretty girl, soft lights, and some rather flashily played jazz.

JOHN BRAINE, *The Vodi*

A generous bottle and a lovesome she
Are th' only joys in nature next to thee.

THOMAS OTWAY

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DEALER IN EVERYTHING

BY JACK SCHAEFER

SOUTH LICKS was a nice town in those days. It couldn't compete with the boom cattle-towns along the railroads, not in bustle and noise and general human devilment, so it didn't even try. It made out fair enough as supply and market centre for a rising number of homesteads and small ranches round about and picked up extra business feeding folks passing through on the stageline. It was a nice town, not wide open and roaring like some but all the same not fussy about folks having their fun as they saw fit, and it had Nate Bartlett's store.

Nate was New England Yankee stock seasoned by a lot of grown up years out in the new States and territories where there was plenty of room for the spirit in a man to stretch and grow some, and that was a combination hard to beat. He'd turned his hand to many a thing in his time and he'd made his pile, staked a claim on a rich ledge, and sold out to a mining syndicate for a fine price, and he'd looked around and settled on South Licks as the place to do what he'd always wanted to do and that was run a store.

All those years he'd remembered the one his grandfather had back east when he was a kid and he'd remembered the tangy smells and the neighbourly feel and he'd never got over the notion that running a good store right was a pleasant way for a man to spend his slow-down days.

He put up a solid frame building fronting on the main street with living-quarters for himself at the rear. He stocked that building with anything and everything he could think of in the

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general merchandise line. He sent away to have a sign made and he hung that sign on a pole sticking out from the roof of the building and that was some sign.

Nathaniel P. Bartlett
Dealer in
EVERYTHING
Wholesale & Retail Satisfaction Guaranteed
If we haven't got it we'll get it

A sign like that was certain to make comment and liven a town's temper. It wasn't long before the South Licksians were proud of Nate and his store. They noticed it had special tangy smells and a special neighbourly feel and they enjoyed themselves testing Nate's service.

They'd stroll in chuckling and ask for some odd thing or other. More than likely Nate'd have it somewheres in his stock. Even if he didn't he'd never bat an eye but just remark he was fresh out of that particular item and would have it ready in a day or two. Smack after closing he'd be over at the stage office confabbing with the telegraph operator there and right enough, in a matter of days, he'd have that item ready.

Like the time Al Foster who ran the Good Licks Restaurant came in and asked for a pair of red, white, and blue braces. Nate looked up from the mail-order catalogue he was scanning for more things to put on his shelves. He never even cracked a smile. "Any particular design?" he said.

"Why, certain," Al Foster said. "Red straps, white hooks, blue cross-hatches."

Nate tapped his forehead thoughtful like he was studying over what he had. "Seems to me I had some like that," he said, "but I'm fresh out as of now. Come around next week."

And right enough, when Al was passing the store one day next week, Nate hailed him from the door and Nate had those braces, just as ordered. He'd sent to the factory and had them made special. Al was so tickled with them and the talk they stirred, he was down a while with pneumonia in the fall waiting too long to start wearing a coat over them.

It was about two-three months after Nate arrived in South Licks and opened his store that Kemp Ackley first saw that sign.

Kemp was a Texan-born-and-raised who'd been away from his home state long enough to have the usual brag and horny layer rubbed off, exposing the real man underneath and that was a hard combination to beat too. He was somewheres in his early thirties, a hard-riding, hard-working, hard-playing man who'd

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filled his pockets one night bucking a faro game and right away put the cash into good cows and started building himself a herd.

He had a ranch about eight miles out of South Licks, the biggest spread in those parts. He worked the place himself, along with four-five riders who could keep pace with him at whatever he might be doing whether that was working or playing or just plain yipping at the moon.

The scale he operated, he didn't try to market through South Licks. Roundup time he'd cut out his beef stuff and drive cross-country to one of the railroad towns. He'd collect his money there but he wouldn't spend it there even though he and his riders'd be ripe for a pay-off spree. He had local pride, Kemp Ackley had. He figured that South Licks was his town. He figured that if he and those who sided him were going to take any town apart and fill the evening air with the clink of glasses and the clatter of chips and the melody of song and gunshots, why then South Licks ought to be so favoured.

He'd head up there from the railroad and coming near he'd collect dry-throated gents from the smaller ranches along the way till there was quite a crowd of them raising dust on the road and they'd come whooping into South Licks with him to help him spend a fair share of the beef money and whatever they could scrape out of their own pockets.

This time Kemp came whooping along in the lead and when he swung into Main Street the first thing he saw was that sign hanging bright and brave overhead. He pulled his horse back on its rump and the others did the same and he looked that sign over.

"Well, now," he said. "Here's something new to add to the merriment of men and nations. Ain't that a pretty target!"

He pulled a gun and spun it fancy on a finger through the trigger guard and clamped his hand on the butt and was raising his arm to fire when out of the corner of one eye he caught sight of old Nate standing in the store door.

Nate was leaning easy against one doorjamb and he was holding a double-barrelled shotgun hip-high with both hammers cocked and both barrels bearing on Kemp.

"I wouldn't do that, was I you," Nate said.

Kemp stayed still, just as he was. "Is that thing loaded?" he said.

"I wouldn't take a chance on it, was I you," Nate said. "I heard you coming the whole last mile."

"Well, then," Kemp said. "I expect you're right. You've got two mighty powerful arguments there." Kemp let his arm down slow, careful where his gun pointed, and slid that gun back into its holster.

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" Shucks," he said. " You ought to know popping signs is all part of the game. Likely you've peppered a few in your own time."

" Likely I have," Nate said. " But I've learnt different too in my time. I'm learning you different right now."

" Well, now," Kemp said, " it kind of looks like you are at that." Something about that old rooster of a Nate leaning there quiet and easy and maybe deadly too seemed to tickle him. " Boys," he said, " this is one sign we leave strict alone." He slapped spurs to his horse and led the way on along the street to swing in by Ed Lafferty's Licks-That-Thirst saloon.

It was six, seven, maybe eight drinks later, near the time Kemp and his crew'd be heading to feed at Al Foster's place and get up strength for a full evening's fun, that Kemp got to realising he couldn't keep that sign out of his head. " Cocky old bird," he said to himself. " ' Dealer in EVERYTHING.' Puts that in capitals too. I expect we ought to give him a whirl."

He downed the last in his glass and called out, " Come along, boys. We've got to find out does everything mean anything."

Nate was tidying up his store for closing when the crowd came in. He set his broom aside and took his usual spot behind his main counter.

" No hard feelings on what was previous," Kemp said. " I was just wondering do you really stand by that sign outside? "

" Certain as sunrise," Nate said. " Each and every word."

Kemp chuckled low in his throat and tipped a wink around at his crew. " Well, then," he said, " me and the boys here have a hankering for some genuine one-dollar-per-each seegars."

Nate tapped his forehead thoughtful. " I'm fresh out of any at that precise figure," he said, " but maybe these might do." He rummaged under his counter and came up with a fancy box and slit the seal and lifted the lid and inside were fat cigars each wrapped separate and that lid said in curlicue letters they were super-extra-panatelas-de-luxe costing one dollar and twenty-five cents per each.

" I'm a flopeared jack rabbit," somebody in the crowd said. " He's topped you, Kemp. You'll have to pay."

Kemp paid. He had to shuck his roll plenty to spread those cigars all around but he paid. He didn't mind that much. What he minded was being capped so neat by Nate. He lit his cigar and looked around and tipped another wink at his crew.

" Well, now," he said, " you met me on that and I've paid. But now me and the boys are thinking it would be nice to top off eating this evening with some of that stuff they call cavvy-yar."

" Are you certain you want some of that? " Nate said. " That's

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powerful stuff for simple stomachs." There was a twinkle deep in Nate's eyes but he was speaking slow and hesitating like he was worried some.

" Certain I'm certain," Kemp said. " I want all you've got—if you've got any."

Nate turned and went to pushing things aside on his shelves and pulled out a flattish wooden box and pried off the top. Inside were twenty-four flattish round cans. " That'll be seventy-two dollars," he said.

" Yippee for Nate! " someone shouted. That was Al Foster standing in the doorway and snapping his red, white, and blue braces. " He'll match you every time, Kemp, my boy. You'd better quit."

" Quit? " Kemp Ackley said. " I'm just beginning."

He stood there scratching the slight stubble along one side his chin. He levelled a finger at Nate like it was a gun. " I'm telling you what I want now," he said. "I'm wanting me a pair of those fancy striped pants dudes wear back east when they go strutting up the avenue showing off for the ladies. I'm wanting me a forked-tail coat to go with those pants. And some pearl-buttoned spats and a—a—"

" Top hat? " Nate said.

" Certain a top hat," Kemp said. " And a gold-headed cane and—"

" And I'm telling you," Nate said in a voice that showed he'd been a lot of things in his time and had stood on his own two feet wherever he was. " I'm telling you I've got all those items right here in my stock and more of the trimmings than you'd ever think of. And I'm telling you I'm not going to sell them to you. Fun's fun. But you don't need those things and you'd look like a misplaced jackass in them and it's closing time for this store anyway.

" And now," Nate said with the twinkle in his eyes shining plain, " I'm telling you too, son, there's a few aspects of your so-called disposition that remind me of the kind of fool I was at about your age. If you'll let me pay the tariff on food for the crowd, by which I mean up to and including that caviare, and then soak in some liquid refreshment to sort of catch up, why then I'll show you how we used to outhowl the coyotes on payday when I was a cowhand down on the Cimarron."

South Licks rocked some on its foundations those evening hours. There were folks used to date things before and after by that night. But the chief thing to be dated from it was the game played by those two, Nathaniel P. Bartlett and Kemp Ackley. Just about everybody else knew better than to keep

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betting against Nate about that sign but Kemp couldn't quit. Every time he came to town he'd try again. It got so he'd be out with his riders working his cattle and sudden he'd swing his horse and head for town and they'd know he'd hit another notion.

He'd step into the store and say, " Still standing by that sign? "

And Nate'd say, "Certain as sunrise," and Kemp'd spring his new one and sometimes Nate'd have it already and sometimes Nate wouldn't but he'd take the order without batting an eye and come through on it surprising quick.

One time it was a genuine imported Swiss cuckoo clock. Nate located one in Chicago and had it out by special express and a pony rider in five days. Another time it was a live monkey with coconuts for feeding. Nate spent plenty of telegrams over that but all the same he had one there in a cage with a crate of coconuts too in a day over three weeks.

Kemp was about sure he had Nate stopped the time he stepped in and said he wanted an engine, a locomotive like they used on the railroad. Nate just looked at him and said, " Eight-wheeler or ten-wheeler? " and Kemp had to say something and said, " Ten-wheeler, of course! " and Nate said he was fresh out of that particular kind but he'd have one soon and in five weeks there it was, standing solid on all ten wheels back of the store. He'd bought it from the railroad by offering more than they'd paid themselves and had it taken apart and carted up to South Licks in freight wagons and put together again.

Kemp had to put his ranch in hock to meet the bill that time. He managed to sell the thing back to the railroad at a fair figure but even so he was hit with quite a loss plus the cartage.

That should have slowed Kemp down. It only made him more determined. He thought and thought and took to moping around in his bachelor ranchhouse thinking. He knew he'd have to get something mighty tricky and special and at last he had it. The more he thought about it and from fresh angles the more tickled he was. He slapped his thighs and laughed smack out loud. He saddled up and rode into town. He looked at that sign and read it over again and laughed some more. He stepped into the store and grinned at Nate. He waved a hand back out towards the sign.

" Everything? " he said.

" EVERYTHING," Nate said.

" Well, then," Kemp said, fighting to hold back the chuckles, " I'm here to order me a wife."

For a full moment, maybe two, old Nate really was stopped. He stared at Kemp and his mouth dropped open a little. Then

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that twinkle started deep in his eyes but his face stayed solemn. He waggled his head sorrowful and started to talk.

"I've been here and I've been there," he said, "and I've been about everywhere in between. I've seen strange things and some stranger yet only a fool'd believe. But I never thought to see the day a white man of the male sex and cattle-handling persuasion would regard a woman of the female sex, a wife-to-be of his board and bosom, as a merchandisable item to be talked of as such across a storekeeper's counter. True, I've heard tell that in biblical times . . ." Nate kept on talking and Kemp kept on grinning, certain he had Nate licked at last and Nate was just stalling to avoid admitting he was licked.

". . . and I've bumped into an Indian tribe or two," Nate said, "that some folks might claim put a price tag on a squaw. But you ain't an Indian and I expect it ain't a squaw you have in mind."

Kemp shook his head, still fighting the chuckles, and sudden Nate reached a pencil and order pad and popped quick words, "Any particular specifications?"

Kemp was startled some. He hadn't thought much past just putting his joke. Then he chuckled out loud. Old Nate was trying to run a bluff on him. "Why, sure," he said. "I like me a woman that has good meat on her bones. Nice curves in the right places, up and down. Face that won't stampede a steer and—and—"

"Reddish hair?" Nate said.

"Why, yes, if you say so," Kemp said, near to busting inside at the way his joke was growing. "I'm kind of partial to reddish hair. And I like me a woman old enough to know better but—"

"Know better'n what?" Nate said.

"Better'n to marry a maverick like me," Kemp said, "but still young and giddy enough to take a chance."

He couldn't hold the laughing in any more and he let it out in bursts between his words. "Oh, I know—you're fresh out—that particular item—but if I'll come around—next week—next month maybe—next lifetime'd be more like it. Shucks, you're licked—backed right off the board—just too ornery to say so."

Kemp was staggering around, slapping his arms and weak with the laughing. He plain had to share his joke with others who'd appreciate it the way his boys would and he staggered out the door and climbed aboard his horse and went skittering towards his ranch.

For quite a stretch, maybe four-five miles, that was about the most enjoyable ride Kemp Ackley'd ever had. He was

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rolling in the saddle, figuring to get his boys and swing back for some real celebrating, tasting already how he'd tell his tale, about Nate's jaw dropping and Nate's longwinded stalling and Nate's trying to run a bluff and how he'd called it.

Then sudden, for some reason, the whole business didn't seem so funny to him. He began remembering. He remembered things like one-dollar-and-a-quarter cigars and a cuckoo clock and a monkey and a locomotive. He yanked his horse around and headed larruping back to town. He pulled to a stop in front of the store. The door was closed tight and padlocked.

He saw Al Foster coming along the sidewalk. "Nate?" Al Foster said, snapping his red, white, and blue braces in a way that seemed mighty suggestive to Kemp. "Nate's closed down for a few days. Caught the afternoon stage out of town."

There was a lot of talk around South Licks all the next weeks. People knew Nate had gone off to get something Kemp had ordered and since he'd gone off personal they figured it must be a tough one and they began laying bets would he get it.

At the same time there was a lot of silence out at Kemp Ackley's ranch. Kemp sat around in his ranchhouse chewing his fingernails. Every now and then he'd stand up and try to kick himself clear across the room. He sent one of his riders into town each day in turn to loaf about and keep an eye open for Nate's coming back.

He got so he shivered like he had the ague just at the sight of the day's rider coming home along the road. He thought some of selling out, maybe just leaving without bothering to sell out, fading away into the hills so he wouldn't have to face the town, but he'd never dodged off yet on a bet or a debt and he knew he'd have to play this through.

Then it was late one afternoon and the one of his boys they called Skimpy because he couldn't raise much hair was fogging home in a hurry. Kemp made it to the porch and wilted there waiting.

"Nate's back," Skimpy said.

Kemp groaned. "Alone?" he said.

"Not exactly," Skimpy said. "There's something with him."

"Something?" Kemp said. "Is it alive?"

"Seems like," Skimpy said. "Leastways it was moving under its own power."

Kemp groaned again. "Female?" he said.

"More'n likely," Skimpy said. "But I couldn't be sure. Nate had it wearing his long coat and his hat with a veil down hiding the evidence."

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Kemp was getting expert with all his practice and he managed to kick himself clear across the porch.

" My oh me oh my," Skimpy said, grinning wide. " That's some fancy acrobatics. But you'd best save your strength. Nate says he believes in prompt closing of important deals so he'll be open this evening waiting for you."

Kemp Ackley came into South Licks that evening like he was coming to an execution for which he was slated principal performer. He kept thinking of the happy free-roaming days likely he was leaving behind. He kept seeing horrible visions in the air around him of the frightening things unfeeling folk might regard as marriageable critters of the female sex. His boys had the good sense to tag back a bit where their grins and undertone joshing were out of range.

In town, he climbed off his horse and looked up at that sign shining in the light from the store window and he shuddered all over. It didn't help his spirit any when he went inside and found near all the inhabitants of South Licks perched at vantage points on counters and boxes about.

He looked around, mighty fearful. There wasn't a woman in sight he didn't already know as the nailed-down wife of some South Licks man. He saw Nate sitting quiet and easy on the usual high stool behind the main counter.

He sighed.

" All right," he said. " I'm here."

" So you are," Nate said. Nate's face was solemn as ever but that twinkle was showing deep in his eyes. " Seems to me though," Nate said, " you're a mite pale as a man ought not be on a happy occasion such as this. Now before I produce the merchandise you saw fit to order through me and my store, I want to tell you that so as to be able to produce same I've had to talk myself into a sore throat two weeks running and prognosticate things about you as an upstanding gentleman and citizen of this community that your own mother'd blush to believe.

" Be all that on my own head, but you came blowing in here with what you maybe thought was a good joke; but nothing about this store of mine is a joke to me and I took what you said straight and I'm making good on it. I've got the merchandise and to be certain the service along with same is right I've had myself made a justice of the peace so as I can do the ceremony myself."

Nate stepped back to the door that led to his living-quarters and opened it. " South Licks in general and Mister Ackley in particular," he said, " I'm making you acquainted with my ward

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and niece, Miss Barbara Bartlett, late of St. Louis and points east."

And out through the doorway, stepping dainty as primed in advance by old Nate, with colour high in her cheeks and the lamplight shining on reddish hair, came as fresh and shapely and hearty-looking a young woman as any South Licksian'd ever seen. There were clucklings from the other women present and foot-shufflings and a few whistles from the men.

Kemp Ackley stepped back like someone had hit him. He reached up hesitating and took off his hat and a sort of sick grin spread over his face. He pulled himself together and stiffened some. "Howdy, ma'am," he said.

"Whoa, now," Nate said. "I intend to do this proper." He motioned Kemp to come closer, and all the while this Barbara niece stood still as a statue with a twinkle like old Nate's deep in her own eyes. "I ain't forgot those specifications," Nate said. "I ain't going to have you claiming misrepresentation any time later. You said good meat on her bones. Any objections to the meat on these bones? Step up and feel it if you've a mind to."

Kemp jumped back like someone had kicked him. "Oh no," he said, quick. "Looks all right from here where I am."

"Nice curves too," Nate said, "and in the right places. So you specified. Find anything wrong with these curves?"

"Now, lookahere, Nate," Kemp said. "You've got no call to—"

"My oh me oh my," someone said in the background and it was Skimpy, grinning wide again. "If you're scared out, Kemp, step aside and I'll take over."

"And give yourself a real good look," Nate went right on. "Do you have any lingering suspicion that face might stampede a steer?"

"Shucks," Kemp said. "Ain't you through riding me yet? How'd you expect me to have any objections anyway with the woman herself standing right there listening? There ain't any need for all this talk. I'm caught on my own fool play and—"

"Humph," this Barbara niece said. "So he feels caught, does he? Well, this specifying business goes two ways."

She stepped out and around Kemp while he stood stockstill like he was fastened to the floor, only swivelling at the waist to keep an eye on her.

"Uncle Nate," she said. "You claimed he was handsome. Well, maybe he is in a coarse, unwashed sort of way. You said he has a good ranch and is the kind of man could give a good home. I can't say I see much evidence of that in his present

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appearance looking like a sick calf that's afraid someone'll say boo."

Kemp jerked up straight. His colour was high now too. He was getting his hell-raising legs back under him the way they hadn't been ever since Nate left town. "Sick is it," he said, "and a calf? You just try saying boo and I'll—"

"Boo!" this Barbara niece said.

Kemp tossed his hat to one side and started for her and old Nate jumped between them. "Whoa, now," he said. "Don't you two go messing up this deal just because one's stiff-necked and the other's got reddish hair. This is a business proposition and for and as of now it's to be regarded as such. It's considerable irregular because in this case the merchandise can talk back so it's only fair it be a two-way deal.

"Barbara," old Nate said, "seeing him now and remembering the things I've told you, are you still willing?"

"Humph," this Barbara niece said. "Marrying a man who seems to think a wife is something you can pick up at a store like a barrel of flour is likely a poor risk." She was looking at Kemp mighty intent and speculative and seemed to enjoy watching him squirm. "But seeing as how the honour of our family seems to have got involved through that sign of yours, Uncle Nate, why maybe I can take a chance."

"Well then, Kemp," Nate said. "Here's your merchandise as per order. How do you stand?"

"What's the price?" Kemp said. He was looking at this Barbara niece just as intent and speculative as she was at him and he seemed to enjoy watching her wince at that question of his.

"No price," Nate said. "Except your present freedom as a bachelor."

"All right," Kemp said. He wasn't going to let himself be outdone by any woman. "Seeing as how my own honour's got involved here too, why I'll just pay that price."

It was on that basis those two let old Nate marry them. It was on the same basis those two behaved, free and easy with everybody else except each other, all through the evening at Al Foster's restaurant where the South Licksians cleared away the tables for a noisy dancing jamboree. It was on the same basis they departed for the ranch about sunup in a buckboard from the livery stable with this Barbara niece sitting way over on one side of the seat and Kemp sitting way over on the other side and her trunk behind them in the wagon and Kemp's boys riding well out of earshot range.

Old Nate stood under his sign and watched them go. "Maybe

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I've pushed it too far this time," he said to himself, " but it still seems like a good notion to me. Once they're alone together they'll work it out. If I was either one I'd want me another one just about like the other."

But Nate had his doubts when he went out to call two days later and found those two acting like a brace of gamecocks walking around wary and ready to start clashing spurs over any little thing. Neither one could say much at all without the other snapping to twist it into something mean.

Nate didn't stay long because he was too uncomfortable. Any way he looked at it, he knew he was really responsible for bringing them together and maybe, because of the way he'd handled it at the store, for setting them to striking sparks. He felt he ought to do something but he couldn't figure what.

Nate's doubts didn't improve with the rumours that began reaching town the following days. Kemp was said to be staying in the bunkhouse with his boys. This Barbara niece was said to be holed up in the ranchhouse. Nate was worried plenty when he heard that.

He was just tidying things to go on out there and see what he might be able to do when this Barbara niece came walking in the store door. She was mussed and dusty and right ready to cry any minute. She'd waited till Kemp and his boys were off somewheres out of sight and she'd wangled a horse out of the corral and made it to town.

" Uncle Nate," she said, " I'd hate to have that longlegged excuse for a husband you wished on me think I'd run away from anything but it can't go on like this."

Nate was mighty sorry for her but he remembered she was good Bartlett stock and he figured he could be brief and blunt.

" So maybe you'd like to get free of him, eh? " he said.

" Well, I don't know," she said, and she was so close to crying that a couple of tears leaked out and started down through the dust on her cheeks.

" Out there bossing around that ranch which is where a man like him belongs I can see maybe he's some of those things you said he is. But he isn't a real man. He's just a big chunk of wood. He's got about as much sentiment in him as one of those big steers of his. Every time he gets near me he can't seem to get past thinking of all that silly specification business and how he was caught and just had to marry me."

" I wonder now do you give him much chance to—" Nate started to say and had to stop quick because he saw something outside.

He managed to push this Barbara niece into his living-quarters

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and close the door and be back at his main counter when Kemp Ackley came in, walking slow and sorrowful and looking back at that sign outside.

" Nate," Kemp said. " When I think of that wife you pushed off on me holed up in the ranchhouse and me slipping off in the other direction and circling around to come here so she won't know what I'm doing, well, Nate, I feel plumb bad. Things can't go on like this. You take that sign of yours now. You still stand by it? "

" Certain I do," Nate said, stiffening some.

" Well, it says something I never paid much notice before," Kemp said. " It says, ' Satisfaction Guaranteed.' "

" So-o-o," Nate said. " So you ain't satisfied with this last transaction." He felt a mite sorry for this Kemp too but he remembered Kemp was stock he'd thought could match the Bartlett and he figured he could be brief and blunt this time too.

" You want to turn the merchandise back? " he said.

" Don't be so allfired hasty," Kemp said. " I ain't exactly complaining about the merchandise as such. It meets those specifications right enough and now I've seen it close maybe some we didn't even mention. But it acts most of the time something like a snapping turtle that tolerates living in the same country with me only because of that silly family-honour business.

" I ain't so cocky as I used to be. I'm not demanding a thing. I'm just wondering is there any way you could go about guaranteeing some of that satisfaction."

Nate looked at Kemp a long minute or two. Then that twinkle began to show in his eye. " Kemp," he said, " if you acquired a windmill or a hay cutter or some such piece of machinery from me, there'd be instructions how to operate same and keep it operating along with it. You'd pay smart attention to those instructions, wouldn't you? "

" Of course I would," Kemp said. " That's simple sense."

" Precisely and exact," Nate said. " Well, you acquired a wife from me. There was some instructions supposed to go along with her that I forgot to give you. Wait a spell and I'll see can I remember what they were."

And old Nate took a piece of paper and his old quill pen. He chewed the top end of the pen a while and then he dipped it in ink and started scratching with it. He finished and reached the paper across the counter to Kemp.

INSTRUCTIONS
to keep a wife happy
and derive satisfaction from same

Rule 1. Tell her you love her.

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Rule 2. Tell her how pretty she is.
Rule 3. Think up three new ways each day for following Rule 1.
Rule 4. Think up three new ways each day for following Rule 2.
Rule 5. Mean what you say each time.

"And now," Nate said, "you just keep that paper out of sight but not out of mind. And start following those rules right away." He took Kemp by the arm and back to the door of his living-quarters and pushed Kemp through and closed the door again. He stood there listening a moment and then he nodded his head.

He returned to his main counter and perched himself on a stool behind it and began looking through catalogues for new things he might put on his shelves. He raised his head and looked out of the window at that sign and the twinkle in his eyes was blazing bright. It wouldn't be too long now before he'd be having some grandnieces and grandnephews and they'd be in and out of his store and maybe in later years they'd remember the tangy smells and the neighbourly feel of the place.

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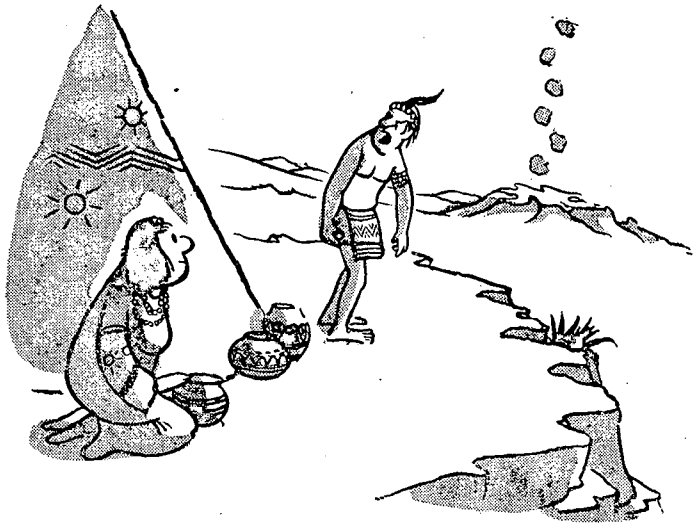

"It's for you."

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DOUBLECROSSED

"Put the correct words," he said,
"and the paper will be worth a fortune"

BY D. SLEIGHTHOLME

MANOLI screwed up his old eyes against the glare of the Aegean sun which reflected whitely from the pale lilac of the sea. "Where?" he called.

"Across the bay and where you see the path climbing the hill; see it?" The peasant in the ragged striped trousers pointed.

"I see it."

"Above the olive trees there's a white villa standing alone; see that?"

"I see it," Manoli said. He screwed up his eyes and face until it seemed he was grinning. He wasn't grinning—he was too serious to grin, he'd waited long for this. "And that is where the Englishman can be found, eh? You're sure, Andreas, this isn't another of those damned jokes of yours?"

Andreas drew himself up with dignity. "The man who drives the truck told me, and he heard it in the village from the priest."

"Then I'd better be going," Manoli said. "One can't tell with foreigners, they've no sense at all; gone in a flash. I've waited too long to allow my chance to pass."

"What about your goats, man?"

"Them? They can wait. When I find the man and he writes for me in his language on my paper, I'll need no goats, my friend. You can take the goats; I won't need goats in America."

Andreas looked embarrassed. "I'll look after them until you're back, Manoli. One can't be too sure that things will turn out as one wants them to, eh? I mean—well, suppose this paper . . ." He stopped unhappily and looked at his friend for support.

"You've no faith!" Manoli said. "The paper is worth a great deal of money. I've had it for five years just waiting for this." He laughed tolerantly. "Why even I didn't guess its value at first. It washed up out of the sea right where we're sitting now. I was sitting by the water and in it came on the water, rippling like a snake. I saw that it looked interesting

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and I picked it out and dried it—there on that rock. It was the man from Athens who told me what I'd found."

" And what was that? " Andreas asked. He'd heard the story so often that his response was like the response to a litany.

" He said it was valuable. He'd seen such papers before when he was working on the steamships and travelling to England. With papers like this one only needs to write on it in the English and be sure to put the correct words and the paper will be worth a fortune. The man from Athens was second cousin of my sister's husband," he added, confirming the authenticity of the opinion.

" All the same," Andreas said, " I won't accept your goats just yet."

" Come to the café and we'll have a drink and I'll show you my paper again," Manoli said spaciously.

Along the shore there were caves in the grey rock and in one of them a man had set up tables and chairs. There was a palm thatch lean-to outside and one could sit in the dappled shade and listen to the low sigh of the water on the shingle beyond the cave and to the sleepy voices of the goats.

At night, when the pressure lamp was hung from a beam and the huge moths danced to its hissing, the shepherds would come from the hills and the goats would wander among the tables. The fishermen would come up wet from the sea and there would be a flute and a guitar and the men shuffling in solo dance, womanless and clumsy as bears. The café was an important place. That was why Manoli, for all his hurry, needed to go there. It set the seal of regularity on his good fortune.

It was early in the afternoon and there were no other patrons, but Manoli glanced around covertly before he reached inside his shirt for the precious paper.

It was folded small and the creases were tender. The paper was so deeply stained by the sweat of the old man's body and by the patina of thumbprints that it looked like a piece of old horse leather.

" Isn't it a bit dirty? " Andreas said.

Manoli glared at him. " This is the sweat of a man's toil. Sweat is the fruitful rain that nourishes the harvest of a man's faith," he said portentously.

Andreas looked unconvinced. " And if they send you this money, what then? We old men have forgotten how to spend money; you have to be young to spend splendidly."

" Electra," Manoli said.

Andreas had forgotten Manoli's granddaughter. Everybody laughed at Manoli for the way he idolised that girl. She was a

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shade too pretty for Andreas' taste and her talent for drawing on the café walls—remarkable though it may have been—was no sort of qualification for the future wife of some fisherman or farmer.

"I know, I know!" Manoli said, reading the other man's mind. "She'd be better off as a bedmate to some local lad than she'd be learning to make pictures up in some big school in the city. This'll alter all that, Andreas. Just let me get my hands on that money and I'll take her to America, where all my brothers went thirty years ago. She'll do well out there. None of your scratching in the dust, growing into an black crow of a woman who drops a child a year until she dries up into a carob bean."

The other man nodded, wisely reserving his opinion. Electra served wine in the café at night and it was good to look at her as she swayed among the tables with her little round bottom taut as a melon, and the men with their half-closed eyes, murmuring sweetudes in her blushing ears. Electra was a fire which even found its way into his own wintry veins when the wine was going round . . .

Manoli unfolded the paper with care. It was crossed and recrossed with folds, and the dirt on the back made it stiff. He placed it flat upon the table.

The paper was an old, very outdated, very faded football pool coupon. The men stared down at the incomprehensible foreign lettering with respect.

"So!" Andreas whispered.

They drank in silence and the onshore breeze from the sea began to stir in the eucalyptus trees along the shore and the dust rose from the plain and went whirling over the panting earth towards the hills.

Manoli was lost in thought and the deep lines along his cheeks were full of shadow. One prayed and waited, he thought, and one sweated a little and then all in good time faith was rewarded. He felt a great calm upon him, thinking of how it would be in America. Electra with her slim throat and round limbs would never know what he knew about growing old in this land of dryness where the sun sucked away the fine juices of youth and left only a drying husk.

"And now I shall go!" he said at last, rising and putting the folded paper carefully back inside his shirt. "I'll take the road and walk until the truckdriver passes on his way to the village and then I'll ride with him to the Englishman."

He went to the back of the café where the proprietor was watching.

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" Lend me your coat," he said. " I have important business with an Englishman today and I must appear dressed like a man of importance."

The proprietor grumbled but reached into a cupboard and produced a cheap, tight, incongruous sports jacket—the tangible evidence of his connections with the world of finance and sophistication.

Manoli put it on without a word.

He waved to Andreas and strode off towards the road where the eucalyptus trees tossed in the seawind and gleamed white as old bones as the leaves turned in the sun.

Andreas watched him go and then he turned and began to count the goats.

In the square white villa which was like a lump of sugar glaring against the hillside, the man whom they called the Englishman and who was no more English than he was Greek or French or Italian in the great cosmopolis of the criminal world watched the approach of Manoli from behind the slatted blind. The man had the pale goat-eyes of the killer, and the barred shadow of the blind striped his body like a tiger. He had a hand inside his coat, holding the butt of his gun.

In English he said, " Who, who—wait now, don't shoot yet." He muttered it to himself in the way of a man who has been alone for too long; and all the time, innocently, Manoli was coming nearer.

Manoli picked his way up the steep track, bowed under the heat of the white sun. In one hand he held the football coupon and in the other a stub of pencil.

The Englishman slid the gun back into the place under his shoulder and opened the door. He stood and waited.

" There's a fine view from your house, Englishman, but one pays a heavy price to reach it," Manoli said. " The older a man gets, the higher grow the hills."

The Englishman grunted. " What do you want, man? "

It was too abrupt an opening for the old peasant. There were civilities to be exchanged.

" You've got a fine place here, sir, very fine. I come from across the bay by the little islands there," he said, pointing. " It's a long hot walk for an old man—nothing to a young fellow like yourself now, although there was a time when I—"

" I said what do you want? Who sent you up here? "

" Nobody sent me," Manoli said, puzzled.

" How did you know I was here? "

" Know? Everybody knows of the Englishman."

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" They do, eh. And they talk, I suppose."

" People talk," Manoli said. " That's why I came here to ask you to give me some help with this."

The Englishman watched stonily as Manoli spread the coupon for him to see; then he grinned and laughed abruptly.

" You know about this paper? " Manoli asked.

" How the hell do you come by this, old man, or are you on their mailing list? "

Manoli shook his head uncomprehendingly. " It washed up from the sea and I've been waiting for an Englishman who can help me to write for the money."

He saw the Englishman's eyebrows rise, and forestalled him. " It's a simple matter," Manoli said, " all that's needed are the words in the proper places and then when the money comes I'll be able to repay you for your great kindness."

" It's as easy as that, is it? "

The man was laughing, not pleasantly, jeeringly. He said, " You expect miracles, my old friend. I can't work miracles, so I suggest you turn round and beat it down the hill the way you came up and then forget how you got here and tell the rest of your hairy friends to do the same."

Manoli looked down at his coupon, folding it slowly, carefully, nodding. He didn't understand what had amused and yet annoyed this strange man. He felt the weight of the sun and his age. His shoulders drooped in the sports coat as he turned. This man wouldn't help. It was strange; now he must go back to his long wait again.

Manoli began to go down the hill. The Englishman was lounging against the doorway, feeling the stubble on his angular jaw. It occurred to him that it was bad to arouse antagonism, it would make his presence in the district more conspicuous than ever. " Come back a minute, old man," he called after him.

Manoli turned and went back.

" I can't work miracles," the Englishman said, taking the coupon from old Manoli. He looked at it. " And how the hell did you expect anyone to write on it when it's as filthy as this? "

Manoli peered at it. " The sweat of toil, son," he said. " No man need be ashamed of it, it is the bitter juice of man's labour, a fruitful rain that makes the rocks to blossom with blessings."

" Maybe it'll work you a miracle then."

" I've got faith," Manoli said.

The Englishman took from his pocket a thick brown envelope. He looked at it for a moment and smiled slyly. " Give it to me then and the pencil. I'll write for you." He spread the coupon on the envelope, using it as a table. It seemed to amuse

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him. " Sweat and faith, eh! Stick to that then, it'll keep you healthy, my friend. Me, I've got another philosophy. Mine works faster and it's cleaner."

He filled in the form with haphazard crosses while Manoli watched reverently. The Englishman looked at the stub of pencil. " Sweat and toil! You people love it, don't you? Even your damned pencil is hard as a flint. I have to bear down as if I'm ploughing."

" The hard ones last the longest," Manoli said.

" Now you've said something, old man. The hard ones last the longest. You don't know how right you are." He stopped. " What's your name and where do you live? "

Manoli told him.

He shifted the paper so that it was square upon the stiff brown envelope and, pressing hard, wrote the name of Manoli and the place where he lived.

When he had finished writing he replaced the big envelope inside his coat and held up the coupon. " You can leave this with me," he told the old man. " Now you can go home and get on with your sweating, and don't come around here any more. Understand? And spread the word that I don't like visitors."

Manoli straightened himself up and buttoned the sports coat across his hollow chest; he cleared his throat. " Sir," he said, " the kindness which you have this day bestowed upon—"

" Get moving, I've got things to do."

" No offence, sir," Manoli said, " your ways are different from ours. When the money arrives I shall come again and we shall drink and dance a little. I have a friend who plays well on the flute and . . ."

The Englishman had turned his back and gone into the house, shutting the door in the old man's face. From the shelter of the slatted blind he watched the old man make his way down the slope. After a while, when the figure had shrunk to the size of an insect and the silence had closed round again, the Englishman folded the football coupon twice and then a third time and tore it across, letting the pieces flutter to the floor.

" Sweat and faith," he said to himself. " Go back to your long wait, old-timer; your sweat will never get you closer to a heap of money than it did today." He felt the firm fat envelope in his pocket which he'd used as a table to write on. It was a little irony which he had enjoyed.

When it grew dusk the man drew a chair to the window and sat watching the road which lay shining in the afterglow along the valley bottom. It was like the dull silver track left by a

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snail. He was watching as he did every evening for the headlights of the car which must soon come. He had been waiting on the hill for two weeks and he was ready to move at a moment's notice —there was only the fat brown envelope to deliver.

Thinking of it, he tapped his pocket to make certain it was still there. There could be no mistakes in his profession and he was only a minor link in a vast network of agents. They had placed him up there on the hill to wait, that was all. When the car came he would hand over the envelope and that would be the end of it. Somebody was being paid for something, he supposed, but beyond that he knew better than to query. He got his cut when it pleased the people in Athens to pay him—that was enough.

He wondered, not for the first time, if there'd been a hitch, if somewhere along the line the police had made a pounce. He wondered if that was the reason why the car was delayed; and there was the dangerous, intoxicating thought that the brown envelope and its contents might well become his own property.

Outside on the verandah a little wind was stirring and the scattered fragments of paper whirled and fluttered like moths in through the door. He looked down at them reflectively.

"Faith," he murmured. The old man would sit and wait and wait, nursing his faith over the years, refusing to abandon it, wearing it to tatters until it disappeared thread by thread and left him naked. That was how it went for people who stuck to their faith in miracles. You had to go out and hammer your way. Leave faith for the old men whose blood was like water. "My faith is under my armpit," he told himself. "I work my miracles with the pressure of a finger—an envelope filled with miracles."

The hour of the long-delayed rendezvous arrived and the sky had grown dark, deep blue deepening to black, and pierced with stars overhead. The man's head was a hard silhouette where he sat at the window, it was the sort of silhouette that a child might draw with zigzag lines and sharp angles, harsh as quarried rocks.

There was no sign of the headlights.

He rose then and went to the inner room where there was bread and a pâté. That was when the headlights came sweeping along the valley, touching the olive trees whitely, searching ahead of the car like the antennæ of a moth. The man didn't see them.

Death comes to people in strange moments. A man may die in the middle of a yawn or fall to his death from a footstool or like the Englishman, bounding over the still-hot soil of a foreign land, his mouth incongruously filled with crusty bread and pâté.

It happened like that. It was too late when he heard the footsteps. Too late when he saw through the slats of the blind

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that the men outside wore uniforms; and when he began to run it was already too late because the neat little lead slugs—like tiny stubs of hard pencil—were faster, and he felt them hitting his body as he bounced wildly down the hillside with his jaws clamped on the food. The bullets felt as if he was being jabbed savagely with a stick from behind.

He was on the road when he died, and like those of prehistoric beasts found deep-frozen in glaciers, his dead jaws held the food of survival half chewed.

When they picked him up they didn't notice the fat brown envelope which lay among the stones by the roadside. They stood round the sprawling figure, their guns like accusing fingers, and then the headlights of the car came along the valley and their shadows leapt to life and went stretching away down the road, huge and impossible. The Englishman cast only a very small shadow.

They loaded the body into the car, the doors slammed, and within a few minutes the valley was silent again and up in the villa was the half-eaten pâté and down in the road lay the fat brown envelope, all that was left to mark the passage of a man.

Just before full daylight a carob picker on his donkey came down the road. If the donkey hadn't shied at the bloodstains in the dust the carob picker might never have seen the fat brown envelope. Neither would he have noted the barely legible address—faint, yet deeply pressed.

Under the eucalyptus trees there was a wide pool of shade where a cool little wind seemed always to blow, it was the place where Manoli had chosen to sit each day to wait for the truck which would one day bring him the money from England. He sat serenely, content to feel the breeze stirring his moustaches and drying the sweat on his chest. His goats watched him with their sidelong gaze, like gossips who fear to be noticed eavesdropping. Manoli had been there every day for a fortnight.

Andreas came down the road and stopped by the shade.

"You're already tasting the fruits of idleness I see," Andreas said, a trifle sourly. He was hot from picking carob beans and the dust irritated his eyes and tasted gritty between his teeth.

"I want to be here when my letter arrives," Manoli said. "I don't trust that sly old devil at the café."

There was a dust cloud approaching along the track and the two men turned to watch it. The truck which caused it swayed and rocked over the uneven track and at length it slowed and stopped close to where they sat.

The truckdriver leaned from his cab, brushing aside a frieze

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of holy relics and lucky charms which hung round the glassless windscreen. "Manoli!"

The old man scrambled to his feet. "I come," he said.

The truckdriver fumbled in his bag and produced the crumpled brown envelope the carob picker had given him. It was fat and heavy. "Manoli, take this accursed thing and pay me the postage which is due on it. Your friends evidently don't think you worthy of a stamp; nor do they wish to waste pencil lead on you, by the look of the writing."

Manoli took the envelope and held it at arm's length, studying the writing on it. The words were faint like a carbon copy, a grey shadow and deeply lined as if the writer had pressed very hard. On a corner of the envelope a line of X's wandered into oblivion. Those he didn't see.

Manoli opened the envelope and looked at the closely-wadded notes bound with string. "Ahhh!" he breathed.

Andreas stared and stared then.

"So it was true!" he whispered.

Manoli nodded briskly. "It was only a matter of waiting and having faith—and anything is possible with a little faith."

"And sweat," Andreas put in.

"And sweat," Manoli echoed. "Sweat is the rain which nourishes the flower of man's toil, Andreas. A man's destiny is written in sweat," he added innocently.

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DROP SHOT

Drop in and take a pot shot—or have we got that mixed up? If the watched pot won't boil, turn for solutions to page 97

1. *Who was Romeo's first love?*
2. *How far are you allowed to drive off the road in open country?*
3. *What English king was loved by Edith Swan-neck and buried at Waltham?*
4. *Which school can boast these pupils: Byron, Peel, Palmerston, Baldwin, Churchill, Galsworthy?*
5. *What articles are buried under Cleopatra's Needle?*
6. *The stump of one kind of tree makes quite a decent dancing-floor —which?*
7. *The Corinth ship canal was finished in* 1893. *Who first started it?*
8. *Anobium, Ptinus, and Atropos—who are these small literary characters?*

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BREAD on the MOON

By WILLIAM MAYNE

YOU FLY the first hundred miles. You can, there's air. Then you've come over the edge, on to the part you can see from the Earth, and the air's gone, you have to bring the craft down. Like this . . . There's a smooth place, at least it was smooth until the sun cracked it. They put water on it when you land. It's a sort of mending, to clear away the wheel marks, like when people scrub a step on Earth.

You get orders there where to go and what to get. The control tower gives orders. There's a robot working on the landing-ground, with a brush. It's a big machine but they call it a brush. It has a shape like a boat, and it makes foam and a lot of noise.

This journey is for provisions. You have to get an extra provision tank from the hangar. They hang them up there. The lever in the side of the cockpit does it. The arm comes out from the side of the craft and hooks on to the tank. The arm is made of aluminium girders. It goes up, click, and comes down with the tank, latches it into the side of the craft, and it's ready for take-off.

Hovercraft. Fold flying wings, lower cockpit cover, connect airlines, switch on heaters. Control tower gives the signal to go and be sharp and not take all day. A day is a fortnight here. Switch on coolers, because it's sunshine all the fortnight right across the moon. You sleep for a fortnight when you get back.

Motors. Motors on. The water keeps the dust down. Nothing coming. Control tower waits for you to get over the white line. Taxi over. Flash to control tower. Control tower flashes back.

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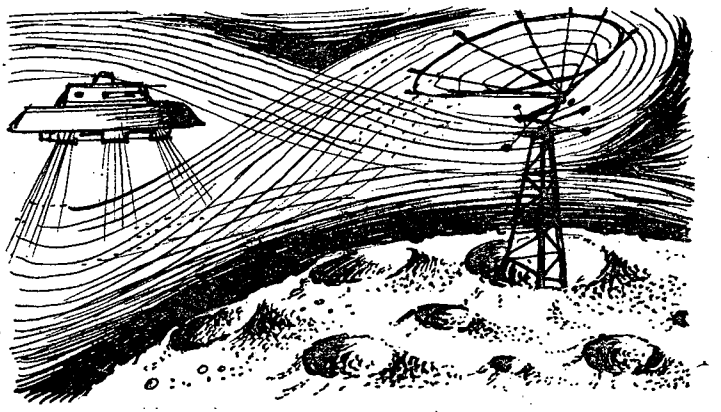

Lose height again, because you can, going over the edge. Into the sunshine. It is brighter than the Earth, put on sun-shield and make a straight line across the crater. This moon is full of volcanoes, and a wall ahead, tunnel in it. Switch on sun-power lights, line up on tunnel. There's more gravity inside, you have to go through fast, that's what takes skill, the craft tries to hit the wall, there's gravity in them. Put on double speed, skim the wall. Out of the shadow, reduce speed, put out sun-power lamps.

Meteorites ahead, and one or two craft from Venus with Venusians in them looking out. They go at the speed of light, with Moon dust behind them. Get into radar track to control tower giving off direction signals. A day's journey there, meaning Earth days, a night's journey across the meteor track.

Then it's against the Moon-wind. There is one, of moving dust, not air. Then you have to take a bearing on the two flashing stars, and go from one to the other. Yellow lights are the ones that show. Nowadays you can see them from the Earth.

It would be summer on the Earth now. At night you can see it marked out. But it's day now, this week. Earth time and Moon time get muddled up. Another day against the Moon-wind. Examine tanks. O.K. for fuel.

Two and a half days out now, Earth time. Provision depot ahead. Switch on forward reactor rockets, close main jets. Ground speed dropping. Come lower. Among the rocks now, down into the valley. It has straight sides, Moon people live in those caves. Reverse into the store.

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Control tower robot says easy there, mind the biscuits. They shouldn't park emergency rations so near the runway. Switch off. Test air outside, remove canopy. Smell of Earth food. Extend tank. Mechanical robot fills tank. You won't stay the night. The people might begin starving if you don't get back. Lock tank in place. Assisted take-off. Hover, you have to wait for air lock to open. Then back the same way, two and a half days, day and night (Earth) in the same place. How fast the Earth spins when you watch it by night.

The tunnel again.

Switch on anti-gravity device, you have to with a full tank. Up and on to landing-field. Keep wheels off white line, it's got to last until tomorrow.

Flash from control tower, you've been quick, not many minutes. Flash to tower, five, but you mean days. Come and get it, says tower, and stop scuffing the step. Leave craft on landing-field and go in to Earth-type breakfast. Hang up the basket, says tower. Take the loaf out first. © William Mayne 1960

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THE RANKS OF TUSKANY

Travel agents and others who keep in touch with the ups and downs of railway affairs, and the ins and outs of railway regulations, were recently circularised by British Railways to the following effect:

CHARGING OF CIRCUS ELEPHANT CUBS

Difficulties have been experienced in obtaining proper charges for the conveyance of circus elephants by Passenger Service, in consequence of firms maintaining that all elephants used in their circuses are cubs and chargeable therefore at G.5(E) Scale, Col. 1.

The inter-regionally agreed definition of an elephant cub is " not exceeding six feet in height from the ground to shoulder-level, i.e. to the ridge formed at the top of the shoulder-bone when the animal walks and/or not exceeding five years old," and it has been established that some animals do not conform to this definition.

Therefore in the event of these animals being forwarded by Passenger Service, charges must be raised as follows:

CHARGES

2 Adult Elephants, G.5(E) Col. 3 per animal.

3 Cub Elephants, G.5(E) Col. 1 or double G.5(E) Col. 1 per truck according to length of vehicle.

from *The Guardian*

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SPECULATIONS OF FUNG CHU

" Perhaps you can pay without money," he said, and his wrinkled face smiled

BY W. P. DOMANOWSKI

IT IS SAID that when the Tinito first came into the Sociable Islands, he slowly stumbled off a ship, his clothes sticky, beads of sweat glistening upon his blank bland face. He stood for a moment, blinking slant-eyed before the glaring brightness of the sun. Then he shouldered a little bag, and shuffled off in his slippered feet, his pigtail swaying, seeming humorously out of place in the costume he wore.

This was the forerunner. For after him others of his kind began to come, sometimes with their women, most often alone. And some were sleek and fat, some tall, some short, but all of them came pigtailed and garbed in the costume of their native land.

It is said, too, that his arrival was greeted with derision, that the native regarded him with laughter, and the Popaa as an inferior. What the Tinito himself thought of his welcome is not known. For no one, either native or Popaa, thought of inquiring, and the Tinito himself said nothing of what was in his mind.

Instead, he applied his native qualities of hard work and cunning to forge a place for himself in this new land. He worked from sunrise to sunset and often late into the night. He scraped and he scrimped, he went without, and then after years of effort he opened up a business.

It is said, too, that before the Tinito adapted himself to his new land, his shrewdness was hard and merciless. Whether it was the manner in which he had been greeted or the harshness of his former existence that went towards the making of his hardness, is not known. But many a native who had laughed and made mock when the Tinito first came lost his lands to him later. For the natives of the Sociable Islands are innocent of the ways of commerce, they are guileless and fun-loving, but the Tinito is shrewd and clever and wise in the ways of the world

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that so often seems too merciless towards him that he should concern himself with mercy towards others.

Among the first several hundred Tinito to arrive was Fung Chu. He had a long thin face that seemed ill-suited upon his short plump body. A light sparse beard drooped from his chin, and his pigtail was usually rolled and concealed under a black skullcap.

A flood in his native province had destroyed all he possessed. He, his wife, and their two little children barely escaped with their lives. With starvation closely dogging their heels, Fung Chu signed a foreign labour contract for three years. Some money was paid in advance to take care of his family. He left them with his younger brother and set off.

It was during this period he first heard of the Sociable Islands where no one ever starved and there was plenty for all. Towards the end of his servitude, he decided to go there when word came that his wife had died. The remnants of his three-year wage provided passage to these islands, with a portion left over for starting his son and daughter on the first lap of their journey to join him.

Fung Chu worked. Fung Chu sweated and scraped and saved. He ate as cheaply as possible, but his huge meals made him more roly-poly than ever. The strain of his efforts showed in the increasing patchwork of wrinkles that deeply lined his face, so that it looked furrowed and crisscrossed.

But five years later he opened up the first store in the country outside the town. For in his shrewdness, he saw that the country folk would come to him nearly every day instead of going to town once a week for purchases. And Fung Chu prospered.

One year after he opened his store, his children were more than halfway towards joining their father.

And yet Fung Chu was troubled. When he thought of the distance still dividing him from his offspring, his impatience and his loneliness sharpened the ache in his heart. But there was more. It had taken many years to bring them thus far. It would take many more to bring for himself a woman from his native land. Meantime, he was not growing younger. As the years trickled by, he was failing more and more in his duty towards his ancestors by not begetting sons to provide their spirits with praise and respect.

Fung Chu sighed, and thought wistfully of taking a native concubine. But then, when he reflected upon what he saw staring back whenever he looked into his old cracked mirror, he sighed again. Who, he thought, would willingly enter this kind

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of alliance with him? In the land of his birth, things were different, and a degree of compulsion could be used. He frowned. And then a gleam entered his slanted eyes.

For the next few weeks, Fung Chu eyed each of his customers speculatively. And then one day Marutua came in, and with her for the first time her eldest daughter, Manu.

Marutua was fresh in her middle years, dark and mobile-faced, with candid brown eyes, her body just beginning to broaden. Two years before, her tane had been killed in an accident, leaving her with four children to support. With their land still in her possession, it was not too difficult, save for luxuries, but ready cash came sporadically only after sale of copra. Fung Chu permitted credit at his store, and she ran up a bill. When this reached an excessive amount, he refused to let her have more merchandise until she settled her score. She was indignant, for this was not the way of the island folk. Now she came in with an air of hauteur and triumph.

But it was Manu that tugged at Fung Chu's interest. Her face had the delicacy of a fragile white flower, and her dark eyes, the warmth of the sun and the sadness of lonely nights. Her hair, thick and black, hung in two heavy braids over her shoulders. Her body had the full flush of young maidenhood, slender, firm, well rounded. She was not often in the sun, for her complexion was fair. She walked and moved with girlish quickness.

Marutua threw a handful of soiled crumpled bills on the counter. "Here," she said. "Here is your money, O Tinito with the wrinkled face." She turned to go.

Fung Chu did not understand all the words she said, but he knew, by the tone, the gestures, and the action, that they were not flattering. But as they were leaving, he cried out with well-calculated impulse, "Wait. Wait, O Marutua vahine."

She turned. "What is it, Tinito? Is there not enough money?"

"Perhaps you wish to buy. You have not been here a long time."

"But no money I have. All I had I have given you."

"No matter," Fung Chu said. "I will keep account. You paid me once. You will pay again."

A smile broadened upon the face of Marutua. When she left, she and Manu were both carrying bundles.

Thus was the beginning of the designs and schemes of Fung Chu.

It is not known if these plans might not have been somewhat revised were he aware that Manu's heart was no longer free.

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But this was a well-kept secret, not suspected by her mother, not known even to the one who caused such confusion in her heart.

She first saw him a year before when he visited neighbours to whom he was kin. She was then, perhaps, more girl than woman, or perhaps she was neither and yet both. She was returning from school, walking barefooted.

He was sitting on the stone wall that enclosed the district church, sitting there with the oldest son of their neighbours. As she neared them, she felt the eyes of this stranger upon her. She felt mockery in them, and there was fun and laughter on his face. She saw that there was beauty in his features, that he was big and strong, with powerful arms.

And then she heard him say in loud tones, as though he was asking a question of his kinsman, " Who is this fine flower that comes towards us? Who is this beautiful one who casts such a lovely golden shadow in the sun? "

She felt her face flush, and there was a queer flustered tremor in her heart. She saw his companion say something in his ear, and heard this stranger laugh. Then she heard him speak again. " In another year or two she will break many hearts. In another year or two I bring mine, so it be the first."

Her heart floundered with strange warmth. She felt herself smile, without thinking, and then felt her confusion grow. She broke into a run. Their laughter followed, and she heard him shout, " In another year or two, I will run with you."

She saw him many times after that, for he visited his kin each week. Whenever his eyes fell upon her he called her a little flower or a little bird, and often teased her, but beyond saying, " Ia ora na oe," or " Good day to you," she never spoke to him. Yet these encounters, though they flushed and flustered her, gave her much pleasure and warmth. She found herself looking forward to his visits and his teasing.

But despite this effect, many moons passed before Manu discovered his name was Torea, that he came from the islands to the west, and that through his mother he was cousin to the neighbour's children and related to many other families on the island. She liked the sound of his name . . .

When the male looks upon a girl as a child, he often keeps seeing her as such long past the time when she has stopped being one. And it is sometimes with much astonishment that he discovers the child has become a woman, receptive and responsive. Therefore, for all his teasing, it is doubtful if Torea thought of Manu as anything but a schoolgirl.

That he enjoyed teasing her was true, for he was fun-loving,

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and her confusion and shyness he found droll and amusing.

Torea was handsome and knew it without arrogance, and accepted it in the same way that he accepted the good things in life: the warmth of the sun, the cool sweetness of coconut water, the tiare flower placed in his ear, the sound of himene sung at night beneath the fire-red flamboyant tree, the clapping of hands and the movement of feet when the otea was being danced, the embraces of a responsive woman. His heart was free, his heart was light, and the good things in life were good.

Torea visited his kinsfolk frequently, and saw Manu often. Thus it was that he failed to see the gradual change from girlhood to young womanhood. Nor is it to be marvelled that the eyes of Fung Chu took in immediately, the first time he saw her, what those of Torea failed to see.

Marutua now again came often to the store. Sometimes Manu came with her, sometimes Manu came alone to do the buying. Occasionally, Marutua brought cash. More often, however, she took what she needed, saying she would pay some other time, and promptly forgot about the matter. For to Marutua, as with most others of her kind, the past did not matter and the future did not count. Life was too short, too uncertain to worry about either; and as long as the present had fun and laughter, and was pleasant, no need to worry, no need to strain. And slowly her debt to Fung Chu mounted . . .

A year passed since Fung Chu first saw Manu. Then the first bloom of womanhood was upon her, and her beauty came upon his senses like the first breath of newly-burning incense. With time, her beauty seemed to increase; and whenever Fung Chu saw her, his patience was taxed, although he gave no outward sign of his desire.

At length one day Marutua was in the store alone. No others were present.

" Marutua, vahine," he said in a soft silky tone. " I would like word with you."

Marutua turned. " What is it, O Tinito? " she asked. " Be quick, for my children return hungry from school, and Manu and I must prepare food."

" There is money you owe me," said Fung Chu.

" Again? Well, I will pay you." She turned to go.

" It is much more than you think," persisted Fung Chu.

Marutua stopped. " Well, how much is it? " she asked.

" More than the value of your land," Fung Chu said, and he named the figure.

Marutua caught her breath, and a cold chill of fear crept into

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her heart. She had seen friends lose their lands and their homes, and now she herself was caught in the same snare. Fear for her family, for herself numbed her. "Will you try to take my land?" she asked. "I will not let you. I will fight you with the justice of the Popaa."

"It is not necessary," said Fung Chu. "Your land I do not want."

"Then what is it?" she said. "That much money I do not have. Where can I find that much?"

"Perhaps you can pay without money," said Fung Chu, and his wrinkled face smiled. Marutua had never seen him smile before, and the effect was disconcerting. She gave a slight shudder.

"You have a daughter like a flower. Her name, I think, is Manu," Fung Chu continued.

"Aye. That is so."

"If she provide me with a child," he said, "our debt is settled. If the child is a son, you may also take from my store for another full year. And if she provide two sons, then you may use my store freely for the rest of your life and mine."

"And if she is not willing?"

"You are her mother," he said. "Would she disobey her mother?"

"It is not the custom of our people," Marutua said weakly, "to force the wills of our daughters."

"You have long given her a mother's care. Is it not right that she now provide for her mother? It is so simple a thing to ask. A child or two. And no burden upon you or upon her, for I shall care for them."

"You are right," Marutua said. "I will persuade her. Be prepared. Soon will she come to you."

The wrinkled face of Fung Chu beamed. Marutua glanced at him, saw him beam, and hastily departed.

When Marutua returned to her house, she called Manu to her. "Manu," she said, "we are in trouble."

Manu said nothing.

Marutua told of the staggering amount they owed Fung Chu.

"What will we do?" Manu asked.

"Fung Chu is a generous man," Marutua said.

"A Tinito generous! And about money! How?"

"A simple matter," Marutua said. "It depends upon you."

"And what can I do?"

"Simply provide him with one or two sons."

Manu stared at her mother. "But I do not want to provide him with sons."

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"And why not?"

"He is old and fat. He is greasy and wrinkled and smells far worse than our neighbour's goat. He is ugly. I could not ever love such a man. I do not want children by such a man."

"Small matters over which to be unreasonable, my dear. Give him one child, which he will keep, and our debt is settled. Provide him two sons, and we may take from his store without stop."

"But, Mother, if it is so simple, why do you not so provide?"

"It is not me he asks, but you."

"He may ask, but I will not go."

"Is it thus you would treat your two small brothers and your baby sister? Is it thus you show your mother gratitude for her care?"

"I would do as much as anyone on this island for a mother. But there is no one that would be asked to sleep with a Tinito. Especially such a Tinito. No. I shall not go."

Marutua grew angry. "You must," she said. "I have promised."

Manu shook her head in refusal. Marutua slapped her and fell upon her. The brief struggle ended with Manu tied up and laid out on a mat.

"There," said Marutua. "Now we bring the Tinito and clear our debt."

Manu glared her defiance, and said nothing. She remained silent as she watched Marutua run off.

Her mother was not long gone, her angry defiance beginning to be replaced by slow despair, when her two brothers, fresh from school, peeked in. "Manu," said the elder in surprise, "what are you doing on the mat all tied up?"

"It is a new game. And if you untie me, I will teach it to you."

The boys hesitated, but with a little more persuasion, they untied her.

"Now," she said, "we must all hide, and when Mother returns she will call to us and try everything to find us, but the first one she catches she will tie up."

"Why?" asked the elder.

"It is just a game."

"It seems a stupid game. I will not play it," the boy said.

"Nor I," echoed the younger.

"Then take the pirogue and spear some fish," said Manu.

"Ah, that is sport fit for us," the elder boy said, and the brothers ran off.

As soon as they were out of sight, Manu mounted her bicycle

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and was off to the town. She hoped that she might find Torea there, for he sometimes worked at the quay, unloading and loading the big ships when they arrived from those vague far-off places where, she heard, lived the Popaa. She did not know where else to turn. She hoped he was not visiting some relatives, of whom he seemed to have so many. When she arrived, she rode along the quay and saw him sitting on some lumber newly unloaded.

She approached the group.

"What brings the little bird here," he called to her, "where there are so many cats to catch her?"

"Torea," she said. "I look for you. I want to speak with you."

He rose and joined her. Someone from among his group cried out, "Guard her well, Torea. It is rare a bird walks so gently to the hand." And everyone laughed. Torea grinned and Manu flushed.

They went a little way where they could not be overheard, and Manu turned to Torea. "I need help," she said. "I come to you. Help me, Torea."

Torea looked at her in astonishment. "But why me? How can I help? Why not your mother?"

"It is because of her I need help," Manu said. "She will only harm me."

"Tell me everything," Torea said. "I listen."

Manu then told him of the contract between her mother and Fung Chu, with herself as the forfeit; how her mother tied her up and intended to pay the forfeit; and how she escaped. "In another hour," she finished, "she will be here, seeking me. And maybe with the Tinito."

"The gendarme will not let the Tinito take you."

"And when has it been the custom of our people to tell the Popaa gendarme our troubles?"

Torea nōdded. "Aye. It is best thus."

"Only you can help," Manu said.

"But how could they think this?" Torea asked. "You are still a child."

"I am small," Manu said softly. "But I am no more a child." And she looked up at him shyly, through lowered lashes.

And Torea, who had laughed so casually at the charms of the island women, felt a strange disorder come upon his heart.

For Torea looked and he saw, indeed, that Manu was no longer a child. He saw that she was small and shapely and sturdy, he saw that there was a great loveliness about her; and

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when he caught the soft shy look from her lowered lashes, he saw, or rather felt, a certain helplessness, a quiet need that relied upon him for strength and protection. For among men, love, or the consciousness of love, is often awakened by the helplessness of a woman and the desire to protect her.

Nevertheless, he asked, "But what difference that you have babies by the Tinito or by some other man?" And he awaited her answer a little eagerly.

"The Tinito is greasy and fat, ugly and old," Manu answered.

"But is there not some young tane to whom your heart belongs?"

Again Manu looked up shyly through lowered lashes. "Aye."

Torea felt icy fingers grip his heart. "Then why not ask him to aid you?" he said.

Manu lowered her head. "I do so," she said.

The heart of Torea soared like a bird greeting the morning sun. "Come," he said. "I take you to my kin in town, and there we decide what to do."

His kinsfolk received her, and he asked them to keep her presence secret. He then led her into the garden.

He plucked a scarlet hibiscus and watched gravely while she placed it in her hair behind her left ear, her eyes shining at the little token. A butterfly fluttered overhead and the sun poured a heavy drowsy warmth. Above them, the heavy fronds of coconut trees waved gracefully at a passing puff of random breeze. Two breadfruit trees stood motionless, their boughs sagging. Several maina birds hopped along the ground, muttering impertinently.

For a while they stood silently, Torea frowning. Finally, he spoke. "At the village farthest from town," he said, "I have a pirogue with a sail. On the island of my parents all pirogues have sails, but here they use the paddle, and mine is the only one with a sail."

Manu looked up questioningly.

"I go there," Torea continued. "I will gather coconuts and pareu and sleeping mats. I will gather taro cake and banana and lime. I will take other things needed. All these I will place in the pirogue. Then I come back for you."

"How long will you be gone?" she asked.

"One week. Maybe less. Maybe more."

"And then? After you come back?"

"Then I take you with me and we will sail away. Sail to some other island where neither your mother nor her Tinito can find us."

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" And when we reach such an island? " Manu asked.

" Then you shall be my vahine, and I your tane."

Little lights of gladness sparkled the eyes of Manu. Torea saw them and felt his heart burst into sudden soaring again.

" Return quickly," she said. " But go now."

Torea kissed her on the forehead and he kissed her on the cheeks. " Do not show yourself," he said. " Keep yourself hidden in the house or the garden. And stay. Stay here." And he left.

For the next week, Manu saw only the inside of the house and the garden. The search conducted by Marutua, by Fung Chu, and by the gendarme failed to find her. But when the week ended, and Torea did not return, Manu became restless and impatient and found her refuge too small to contain her restlessness, so that she began to take long walks in the early morning hours.

And the second time she did so, a former schoolmate stopped to talk to her. Then word passed along to some of her mother's kin, and soon reached Marutua herself. So that two days after being seen, early in the afternoon, Marutua was there with the gendarme. And Manu was seized and returned to her home.

Marutua did not let Manu out of sight. When evening came, she sent the other three children to eat with her sister's family. Then she tied the hands of Manu behind her back. And when darkness came full and deep, she began leading Manu to the Tinito.

" Mother," Manu said, " do not do this thing."

" Hush, ungrateful one," Marutua said. " It is selfish for you to take food from the mouths of your baby sister and brothers and mother."

Manu said, " If that ugliness of a Tinito touch me and make me with child, I shall kill the child, the Tinito, too, and if not I, then my tane shall kill him."

" You have a tane? " Marutua screamed. " Who? "

Manu kept silent.

" Well, small matter. The Tinito need not know, and your tane can be like the maina bird, and leave his young to the Tinito."

But Manu said no more. There was only panic and dulling desperation and hate. These feelings made her mute, for it was not in her nature ordinarily to feel other than quiet joy and merriment.

Thus Manu was led to the dwelling of the Tinito, a crude

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shack with two rooms, each lit by a single kerosene lamp that sent out a dull pale light. The walls were of wood, with a tin roof, the floor of crude cement. The interior was unclean and unswept; and a musty odour, like an evil fetid exhalation, sickened the air. She was thrown into the smaller room, with bedding on the floor. The lamp was picked up, the door closed, and she found herself alone.

For a moment, Manu lay still. Then she rose, and cautiously groped towards the door. She thrust her shoulder against it, only to find it bolted. She could not see the shutters, and knew they were most likely fastened, but she carefully circled the room, trying every few feet to see if something might give. But everything held firm, apparently nailed solid.

She reached the door again, and felt an almost wild panic. She threw her shoulder hard as she could against it.

"Do not fret, my little one," she heard Marutua's voice. "Soon comes your lover."

"Mother, Mother," Manu cried out. "Take me home."

"Hush, little bird," Marutua's voice answered. "Would you disappoint your impatient lover?"

Manu said nothing, but fell to the floor and began to cry quietly. But soon she calmed herself and began to think. She saw the greater disadvantage of her hands behind her back, and began trying to pass them under her feet so that they would be forward. After some effort and strain she managed this, and then lay still for a while, panting.

Soon she heard voices muttering in the other room, and she knew the Tinito had come to claim his prize. There was brief silence, then she heard fumbling at the door.

It opened. The Tinito shuffled in, his black clothes glistening in the sombre light of the kerosene lamp he held in his hand. He placed it in a corner, carefully keeping her in sight. Then he grinned; and to Manu's eyes, his grin appeared like an evil ugly leer. She backed away.

"You are a pretty little love," Fung Chu said. "I will teach you love." He approached her and put his arms about her. Manu placed her hands against his chin and pushed, and Fung Chu reeled back. He scowled and once more shuffled towards her. This time he embraced her, putting his arms about her own. She struggled frantically and they fell. Manu put her knees against him and broke free. She rolled away and jumped to her feet. Fung Chu rose slowly. Perspiration gleamed upon his face, beads of it glistening upon his straggly beard. His lips formed a snarl, and his generally impassive face decomposed itself into a scowl.

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Manu backed away into a corner as he shuffled slowly towards her. When he neared, in blind desperation and panic, Manu lunged with her foot and kicked him in the groin. Fung Chu's angry face paled into the sudden haggardness of pain, his arms automatically folded about himself, and half doubled up, he staggered out. The door closed, and when Manu ran to it, she found it again bolted. She heard the Tinito gasp, and flounder out of the house.

For a moment Manu leaned against the door and then sank down to rest. Then fear entered her mind again. Perhaps the Tinito had gone after her mother. What could she do against the two?

She looked round. Then she went to the kerosene lamp, put her hands around the chimney bottom, and pulled it off, setting it on the floor. She took a soiled sheet from the bedding, wrapped it round the upper part of the chimney, and gave the bottom a sharp light rap against the floor. An edge chipped off. Bracing the wrapped-up chimney between her knees, she began sawing the ropes.

Soon she was free.

Smoking chimneyless lamp in hand, she searched the walls for a loosened board. She found one, and started kicking it, until finally it was loose enough to pull and wrench inside. With this, she began an attack upon a shutter, hinged at the top but nailed fast at the edges and bottom.

She pushed and pounded, and when an opening was forced she used the board as a lever. Eventually one hinge snapped and then the other. Giving the shutter a final push, it fell to the ground. She climbed out.

Immediately she ran off into the darkness, across the road to the seashore. Gradually her eyes became adjusted to the night. She went along, stealthily searching for a bicycle. Finally she found one leaning against a coconut tree, far enough from the owner's house not to be overheard, and borrowed it.

Wheeling it alongside, she came to the road again, mounted the bicycle, and began pedalling to the extreme east where Torea had gone.

The first, longer part of this trip was on a comparatively smooth road, but it was dark and Manu had to feel her way along slowly and carefully.

Dogs came charging out of the darkness, snarling and barking furiously. Once or twice she had to stop to chase them off and avoid being bitten. Sometimes, when she came to a long upward grade, she got off and walked.

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Dawn was greying when she came to the isthmus dividing the island into two unequal segments. The road through the smaller of these was rough and ill-kept, hilly at times, often rocky, sandy, or pockmarked. She coasted down the hill that led into this portion, and then dismounted to rest and watch the colours of the new day unfold.

The rising sun shot off shafts of gold streaked with pale delicate rose. From the horizon's edge, huge clouds towered out of a deep azure-tinted sea, clouds that gathered to themselves the glory of the morning colours. But Manu did not look long. Soon she was on her way again.

Halfway to the village where Torea had his pirogue, two cyclists came near. In the freshness of the morning light, she recognised them for Torea and a kinsman from the house where she had hidden.

She hailed them and stopped. Torea dismounted, walked up to her, put his arms about her, kissed her on each cheek, and was in turn kissed on each.

" Brought was word you had been taken back, and I set off to claim you," Torea told her. He then turned to his kinsman, gave him his thanks, and sent him home.

He and Manu remounted and started towards the village. There he took her to his kin. " Tell me," he said, " how it is you escaped again."

Manu explained. When she told him how she had fought off the Tinito, Torea howled with laughter and then praised her. She flushed with pleasure.

" Now my mother knows I have a tane," she said. " Soon will she make inquiry and know of Torea. And soon will she come here with the Tinito and the gendarme."

" But not soon enough," Torea said.

" At most," Manu persisted, " we have two days before they come."

" Before two days pass," Torea said, " we will be gone."

The heart of Manu felt lightened. No more was said between them until after breakfast with his kinsfolk. Then Torea showed her his pirogue. He had caulked some of the seams and repainted it completely, he explained. And also put in new rope throughout.

Now, he said, he needed but a few patches on the sail while Manu piled up things to take, such as coconut and food. Then they could sail away.

By evening the sail was patched but not yet rigged. Coconut and fruit were piled near the pirogue to enable quick loading in the morning. There were seeds for a food garden, fish-spears

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and fish-hooks, a small fishing net, and two chickens, each in a little cage of coconut frond.

When the first shafts of morning roused the roosters to trumpeting, and the rising sun tinged the skies with saffron and gold, Torea and Manu were at the pirogue. Manu helped move it into the lagoon. Then, while he rigged the sail, she began loading it.

By noon they had little left to do, when another of Torea's kinsmen came. He was tired and dusty, and had covered the entire eighty-odd kilometres from the town in a little less than four hours.

He came to warn them that Marutua had identified Torea as Manu's tane. She and the gendarme were already on their way. Moreover, he said, they should arrive very soon, for he passed them near the isthmus scarcely an hour before.

Torea looked at the sky and frowned. " There is little wind," he said, " but we will paddle into the open sea. But first, we must have water to take along."

Gourds and bamboos were filled and placed in the pirogue. Then Manu went in, carrying a large bundle of pareu cloth given them by Torea's kinswomen. Torea gave a push, climbed in, lashed the sail, and began paddling with the large oar also used as rudder.

In the forepart Manu, using a smaller oar, was doing likewise. The sail hung limp and lifeless. On shore the small crowd of villagers seeing them off gave a cheer.

" Go. Go quickly," they shouted.

They were barely halfway towards the pass in the barrier reef when Manu, turning round for a last look, saw the crowd part, and recognised her mother and the gendarme. The latter shouted for them to return. They increased the pace of their paddling.

On shore the gendarme quickly located the local police chief, commandeered a pirogue, and the two set off in pursuit. A moan rose from the crowd as they saw the speed of the lighter, smaller vessel.

At this sound Torea and Manu turned and saw the pursuing pirogue. They began paddling more frantically but the smaller craft kept obviously gaining.

Back ashore, Marutua watched with eager interest. Unnoticed by anyone, a black-garbed roly-poly figure shuffled up near her to watch. The crowd moaned once more as the pursuit came within fifty yards of the larger pirogue, and the pass still a hundred yards off.

The beady eyes of Fung Chu glittered.

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But at that moment brisk wind tumbled down playfully out of the hills and ran invisibly across the waters of the lagoon. The sail on Torea's pirogue bellied out over the outrigger.

Torea took over the guide rope, and the craft leapt away from its pursuit like a bird swiftly springing into the air beyond the reach of a sluggish land animal.

For a while the two men, the gendarme and the chief of police, kept up the now futile chase.

But when Manu and Torea reached the pass and broke out into the open waters, and rapidly continued to leave them behind, they hesitated, and then turned back. The crowd, watching all this, cheered and cheered gaily.

But in the heart of Fung Chu, there was a deep deep moan . . .

It is told now, by the grandsons and granddaughters of the children of Manu and Torea, how they sailed many many days and suffered many hardships. And these things are told most often in song.

Sometimes a long calm befell them, when they scarcely moved and the sun beat down upon them mercilessly and their sail had the dead lifeless look of a bird's broken wing.

And on such days, Torea rigged a shade for Manu from pareu cloth; and when the nights came, and the stars appeared one by one, like distant scattered petals of pale tiare blossoms, he would recount the glories and the beauty of Manu, singing to the rhythm of the little wavelets that lapped against the sides of the pirogue.

It is said, too, that at times they were beset by sudden squalls and storms. It is told how Manu cowered and how there was fear even in the breast of Torea when their little craft sat in the trough of huge waves that towered over them with a height higher than the highest houses they had seen. It is told how these waves picked up their little boat and carried it up in the air, and how they toyed with the tiny craft for what seemed like the beat of an eternity before the storm passed over and the waters grew once more calm. And when this storm vanished, it had taken away from their store of coconut and gourds; their chickens were swept to sea, and much of their seeds and other provisions.

Soon there came sharks with their sharp fins cutting the surface of the water, pursuing them long mile after mile. And Manu trembled, her heart chilled with the clutch of fear, but Torea laughed loudly and boldly.

It is told how they used their coconut sparingly for fear of long thirst, how sometimes they found coconut floating in the

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sea, and how the rains also kept them from the thirst they feared. They pulled out fish which they ate raw with the juice of the lime and, when there was no more lime, without it. And steadily, steadily they bore towards the east. And many many suns passed.

And it is told how at last they came to a large atoll that was like a pearl necklace encircling a core of emerald studded with turquoise, for much of the enclosed lagoon was a beautiful green colour, and much a pale bright blue. They went from one coconut-crested islet to another, liking each, until they came to the largest. And there they found wild pig and wild chicken from stock left behind by previous settlers. They looked about some more, and they found the pandanu growing, and even taro. And they saw that it was good, and so there they remained . . .

Of the further hopes and aspirations of Fung Chu there is nothing but silence; but it is said that when he saw the pirogue with Manu and Torea fading in the distance, he turned towards Marutua and began to eye her with a long speculative look.

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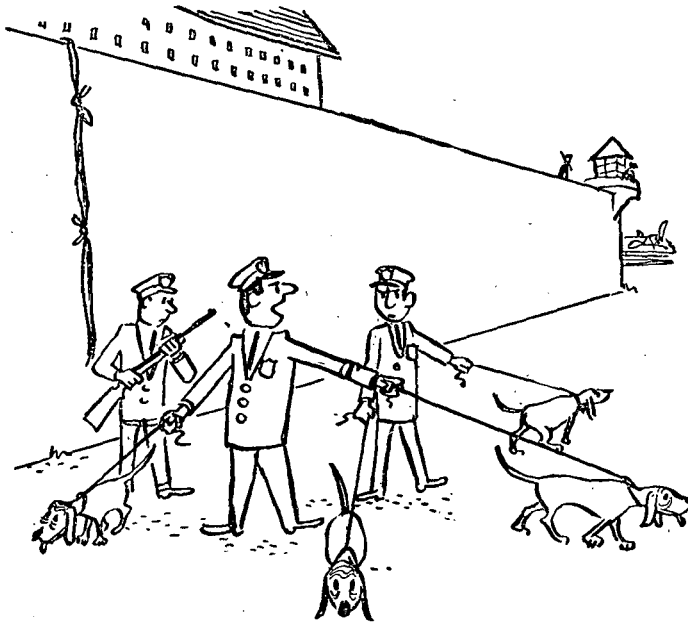

"If you ask me, they've been bribed."

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HIDDEN FIRES

The great cataract of sound roared towards her

BY OWEN GRAY

THE JAGGED twin peaks of Ruapehu were just beginning to take on the pale salmon tint that always came from the evening sun. Susan Reeves knew the pattern well—for three years now she had watched it nearly every evening from her kitchen window. All afternoon the snow slopes, smooth and unshadowed, had glared with almost painful whiteness across the metallic blue of the sky beyond. Only the plume of steam drifting from the crater lake broke the harsh outline of the mountain.

In another ten minutes, she knew, the salmon would deepen to soft pink, and the wisp of steam would darken to grey like a tiny storm cloud. Then the pink would become rose, deeper and deeper, till the sun went down and the shadow would move up the mountainside, wiping off the colour as it went. By the last of the summer twilight the steam would be gone, the sky would be a dark backdrop, and the mountain would stand out in relief, pale, cold, like a great iceberg looming hugely above the valley.

Susan had never seen the crater lake. But over the lonely years the strange plume of steam had stirred her imagination and in her mind she carried a picture of it that was just as clear as the memory of the Thames where it flowed close to her home in London twelve thousand miles away on the other side of the world. Often she had asked Greg about the lake, and he had told her how it filled the inner crater between the two peaks. How it was hemmed in by a wall of ice, and how at times the lake froze over too; but at other times it seethed and boiled like a giant cauldron from the volcanic inferno that burnt unceasingly in the heart of the mountain.

And sometimes, in a quaint fantasy which even Greg knew nothing of, she saw herself in the same image—warm, eager to mix with other people, but frustrated and hemmed in by the coldness of the strangers who were her neighbours.

The sound of Greg's footstep outside jerked her mind back

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from the gleaming mountain. Instinctively she turned to check the temperature of the oven. Greg was early. All this summer, since he had started on the new house, he had seldom put away his tools while any light at all remained in the sky.

He stood at the kitchen door, noisily sniffing the aroma of roasting hogget. He was a biggish man, with the breadth of shoulder to go with his height. His slightly uneven nose and his sandy hair, too long now but due to be clipped too short when time permitted, removed any claim he might have had to being good-looking, but a deep outdoor tan combined with his lazy smile to give his face a sort of rugged interest.

Susan went over and put her face up to be kissed, standing on tiptoe to reach up to him. "Aren't you early?" she remarked. "What's the matter—the moon isn't even up yet!"

He ruffled her hair.

"A little less sarcasm, please, when the master of the house comes home." He took her by the elbow, led her to the front door and pointed down to where the new house was being built.

"Roof's finished. Finished it this evening," he said proudly. "Bit of tidying up inside, plus the painting—that's all there is to do now."

"How long?"

"Six weeks. Maybe eight; no more."

Susan, casting around for some comment, surprisingly could find none.

She should have been excited. She should have been overjoyed. It was not only the promise of moving to the new modern house. It meant much more than that. It meant the end of going without all the little things they had promised themselves. The end of Greg working late night after night, hardly seeing Joey and Kerry, the twins, for days at a time. The end of making do with a battered old truck instead of a car.

Greg was watching her, waiting for the answer that didn't come. At last he spoke again. "With the new house, it'll be a pretty nice little property," he said defensively.

She looked down over the rolling pasture where the snow-fed creek always lapped merrily right through the hottest summer and the grass was rich and green and thick.

"You're right," she said. "It'll have everything a sheep could want." She saw the hurt in his eyes and was quick to make amends. "I'm sorry, darling. It's just—these days are awfully long when you're home so late. I know it's for both of us and it won't be much longer now. I'm being silly, I know it."

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He looked at her thoughtfully, his eyes narrowed.

"That Mrs. Brandt upset you, didn't she?" he said slowly.

Susan laughed quickly.

"Lesson One in How to Stay Married," she said. "Never unload your day's worries on your husband before he's been fed. The roast's ready and you're not." She pretended to examine his work-shirt, holding the cloth delicately between finger and thumb and wrinkling her nose in mock disgust. "Eat in ten minutes. Just time for a shower. There'll be a cold beer poured out."

Back in the kitchen, Susan paused for a moment at the window. The light outside had faded now, and the glass reflected herself and the room behind her. Quite dispassionately, she examined her own image. Small nose. Eyes—they were big and green and maybe quite attractive. Mouth—a bit too large, perhaps. Hair—she examined her hair carefully. It was short and coppery and very curly and as far as she could see there weren't any white ones yet, which she had to admit wasn't bad for a mother of two-year-old twins.

"Just what *is* the matter?" she asked the reflection. "Mrs. Brandt, like Greg said?" Well, yes and no. That had only been a culmination, a focal point of the years of loneliness.

You had to be born to the country life. Susan had decided that long ago. She had been a teacher, but always in a big town—first London, then on a two-year exchange scheme in Auckland. That was when she had met Greg.

But even if she had known then of the loneliness ahead, the long weeks of monotony, the fish-out-of-water feeling whenever she did meet any of the other wives of the farming community; even if she had foreseen the coldness that would meet her attempts to be friendly, and the terrible difficulty of making friends among people you so seldom met anyway; even if she had foreseen all these things, it wouldn't have made any difference. It wouldn't have made any difference because Greg was Greg, and where he was she wanted to be.

"And it might have been worse," she added to the figure in the window. "He might have been a lighthouse keeper."

The Mrs. Brandt episode had taken place the day before. The Brandts were their nearest neighbours. Their farm was two miles away, up near the foothills of the mountain. Susan had borrowed the truck—it was one of the few days that Greg hadn't needed it—and gone visiting. Her call on the Brandts had been inspired by nothing finer than the knowledge that if she didn't do something about breaking the ice no one else would.

Mrs. Brandt had received her politely. They talked about

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Susan's new house and Mrs. Brandt had denounced firmly what she described as the so-called artistic idea of painting houses in modern colours, that is, in any colour except the utilitarian brown that shrouded the Brandts'. Susan's remark that she had chosen a very pale paradise blue was greeted with a derisive snort.

Conversation had been limping to a standstill when Joey's shrill yell brought Susan to her feet. She had left the twins in the truck, and usually they were perfectly happy to wait there indefinitely, holding the wheel and making motor-car noises. But this time Joey had decided to get out to talk to the Brandts' crossbred pig dog, a senile creature whose temper was as uncertain as its ancestry.

When Susan rushed out Joey was flat on his back in the muddy yard, mute with terror, while the old dog snuffled suspiciously in his face.

Susan was still shaking when she told Greg the story. "She just stood there!" Indignantly she described the scene. "Mrs. Brandt just stood at the door telling me I shouldn't have allowed Joey to wander. And all the time I was trying to get the dog—Mrs. Brandt's dog, mind you—away from Joey, and calm Joey, and stop Kerry from crying. I tell you, I was about ready to cry myself by the time I got it all sorted out."

She had said it bravely, making it a joke. But there was a tremble in her voice, a brightness in her eye that hinted at real tears not very far away. Greg had seen the signs, and as usual found the answer in the new house.

"Things will be quite different when we're in," he had said. "I'll have more time, and we'll have the new car. We can have holidays in Auckland—you could even get a trip home in a year or two if the wool prices keep like this."

And Susan had nodded agreement. Things would be different. Except that they would still be here beside Ruapehu where things were perfect for a sheep and the neighbours were cold and distant towards a girl who was not one of them.

There were other things that were difficult for a newcomer too. One of them was the rumbling that sometimes came from deep inside the mountain, reminding her that not very far beneath the sheen of snow and ice lay the restless, white-hot furnace of the earth's interior.

Sometimes months went by in silence, and the lake grew cold. And then there would be a night of deep primeval murmurings and little tremors would shiver through the ground, and in the morning the clouds that hung around the twin peaks would be a shade whiter for the new plumes of steam that billowed up to join them.

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The day Greg had finished the roof of the new house, the grumbling started as they were washing up the evening meal, and continued off and on until they went to bed. To a man like Greg, born within sight of Ruapehu, the noises barely called for comment and he was asleep within minutes. For hours Susan lay beside him, dozing fitfully, waking jerkily from some new or imagined sound.

Her mind was heavy with fatigue as through it raced a kaleidoscope of past events and future fears. The vague menace of the mountain seemed almost a personal thing aimed at her alone—a thing no one else had to bother about because they had all grown up with it. At last she fell asleep, straight into a confused dream in which the crater lake was somehow a fierce dog growling at Greg who was asleep in the Brandts' yard.

When she woke it was still dark, but she could see the moonlight through the bedroom window. She was alert in an instant, aware that something definite had woken her, reaching back into her subconscious to try to recall what it had been. She looked at her watch. It was just after three.

She lay still, listening, tense. Suddenly she became aware of the noise. It was there all the time, constant, a long way off, strange. A sibilant noise, yet with deep overtones, like someone rolling marbles down an iron tube.

She got out of bed and went to the window. In the stark moonlight the mountain shone with green phosphorescence and though it was ten miles away it seemed to tower straight out of their back garden. The night was deathly quiet.

But the sound was still there. Thoughtfully she frowned, her mind going over the possibilities, willing away the small knot of unknowing fear. Not an avalanche. Not an earth tremor. There was no wind. What else was there?

"Can't you sleep?" Greg's voice came drowsily from the bed. Susan hesitated, unwilling to rouse him, and he looked up. "What's the matter?"

"That noise. Can you hear it? It woke me up." She peered into the bright moonlight as Greg joined her at the window. "I think it's getting louder."

Greg turned his head, listening. His hair was ruffled and his pyjama jacket hung open, but there was no sleep now in his thoughtful frown. The noise was there, just a little more obtrusive, but the rumble of it was so steady that it seemed to blend with the silence of the night.

For a minute or so they stood at the window together. Susan was watching Greg's face, and the chill of fear inside her grew more icy as the moments ticked away. Now the sound was a

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roar, distant, menacing, like the far-off drumfire of storm-driven surf, and it was slowly coming closer.

Suddenly Greg spoke. His voice was quiet and incisive as Susan had never before heard it. She saw the faint smile in his eyes, and knew it was there to reassure her. And somehow the cold knot of fear began to melt a little.

"Put on some shoes and a coat," he said tersely. "I'm going to wrap up the twins."

She caught at his arm as he turned.

"Greg—what is it?"

But Greg was gone, grabbing a dressing-gown, sliding his feet loosely into shoes as he half ran from the room. Susan gazed through the empty doorway, frozen for a moment. Then, forcing herself to act calmly, she quickly put on shoes and took her heavy coat from the wardrobe.

As she burst into the children's room Greg was lifting Joey out of his cot, blankets and all. Joey was still asleep and his head rolled against Greg's shoulder as Greg stooped to pick up an almost furless koala bear that had fallen on the floor.

"Susan—lift Kerry up and give her to me. Then bring an armful of clothes."

"What is it, Greg? What's happening?"

"The crater lake. I believe it's burst."

A hundred useless questions leapt to her lips. What did it mean? How did he know? What could they do? How long had they got? She opened her mouth to speak and then snapped it shut. Quickly she lifted Kerry and put her, snuggled warmly in a blanket, into Greg's left arm.

"We'll go up on the high ground," he said almost conversationally. "It probably won't come as high as the house, but we may as well be safe."

Greg stood waiting by the door, Joey and Kerry cradled in his arms, as Susan moved quickly about the house. She made a great effort to match Greg's coolness but her mind was a whirlpool. Important things, trivial things, memories, fears, each was thrown in turn to the surface of her consciousness and submerged again in the confusion of her thoughts.

She took perhaps two minutes. During that time she thought of getting a suitcase, discarded the idea. Thought of making a bundle in a blanket—it would take too long. She thought about clothes, and the tin box where Greg kept things like insurance policies and the children's birth certificates. She thought about Greg's best suit . . . and the almost new lino in the kitchen.

"Better come now."

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Susan straightened up, clasping her fingers round the great bundle in her arms. Greg was right—it was time to go. She had taken some clothes for each of them, and the tin box, and a precious pocketful of things from her dressing-table. Perhaps there would be time for another journey. And then she listened to the noise again, rumbling, vibrant, much nearer, and she knew there was no more time.

Behind the house the ground sloped upwards for a little way, and then more steeply towards the rocky crag that sheltered them from the south wind in the winter. In the bright moonlight they could see a long way up and down their valley. In the stillness there was movement—the sheep were restless. Greg and Susan, breathless from the climb, put down their burdens. The twins were still asleep.

Silently they waited. It was a warm night, but Susan was chilled, shivery with sudden dread, and she felt for Greg's hand. The moon threw a cold, bleaching light over the sloping ground, draining all colour so that the grassy foothills merged palely into the icy backdrop of Ruapehu and the shadows and rocks seemed to shimmer and dance with ghostly movement.

Neither of them was quite sure of the moment when the great bank of water first came into view. Suddenly it was there, half a mile away, a grey-white wall whose centre, thirty feet high, moved majestically along the silvery course of their little river, smudging it out as a cloth wipes out a line on a blackboard.

With deceptive speed the torrent swept down. The noise was a great roar now, deep, deafening, terrifying, and the ground beneath their feet shook with a massive vibration. The huge wave rolled down the valley past them, sweeping great rocks along with it and tossing on its frothing crest a debris of tree trunks and jagged bulks of glacier ice.

Nothing could stand before that towering force. Fences, walls, bridges, everything that stood above the ground was razed, eliminated. The thunderous resonance that set the earth and the air trembling together, the merciless, overwhelming power of it, stunned Susan with shock. Then shock gave way to helpless anger as she saw that her new house, completed but for the paint, now stood in the path of the flood.

Cold with despair, she watched. The new house stood high enough above the river to miss the first surge, but the edge of the wave, curling along the side of the valley, thrashed into it. The wooden structure heaved and tilted, wrenched from its concrete foundations. For a few seconds it rode the flood, pitching and plunging like some grotesque Noah's ark. Then it crumpled and disintegrated and the water swept on, contemptuously

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throwing out parts of the shattered house and leaving them high and dry as it rolled on massively down the valley to the sea.

Behind the foaming head of the first great wave the floodwater came black, flecked with ice, roaring and thumping as it carried along huge boulders from the mountainside. For a minute or two it seemed that the old house would escape the fate of the new one. But relentlessly the level rose. The water sucked and dragged at the old wooden piles and then, as if scenting an easy victory, came battering at the building itself.

Suddenly Susan felt her arm gripped. Above the drumfire of the torrent she heard Greg shouting.

"The truck. I can still drive it clear—we're going to need it."

Without waiting for an answer he was away, running down to the shed where the dark water was already licking round the wheels of the old truck. She saw him hesitate, then plunge through into the shed.

The seconds ticked by agonisingly and he did not reappear. Slowly, without really knowing it, Susan edged down the hillside. The water level was still rising as she waited, willing him to come back.

The second surge that came roaring down the valley on the shoulders of the flood took her by surprise. It came as a wide, curving wave, three feet high, tumbling over itself like a breaker coming up a flat beach. It was only seconds away when some intensity in the great cataract of sound made her turn.

For a moment, she froze. Then she ran, stumbling over the rough ground down towards the shed, and as she ran she screamed his name, and knew that her screams were buried beneath the huge roar of the water.

She saw Greg come out of the shed. Watched him as he braced himself for the impact. And then the wave was on him, hurling him against the doorpost, thrashing him around, sweeping him off his feet.

Icy fear gripped her as she ran. She saw Greg again, one hand grasping the corner of the shed, and she saw the shed was holding firm. Then she plunged into the black hissing flood.

It wasn't just water. It was water thick with volcanic ash from the mountain, a cold abrasive sludge with a density that gave it almost irresistible momentum. Her feet were dragged from under her and she rolled choking in the silt, the friction of it scalding as it rasped the coat from her body and tore the shoes from her feet.

And then, somehow, she was up again, leaning against the force of the flow, fighting her way to Greg. Now she saw that one arm hung helpless beside him, smashed against the doorpost.

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She braced herself against him, supporting him and supported by him, and clung to the shed, and the shed saved them.

The flood was over almost as quickly as it had come. One moment they were nearly waist deep in its clutching blackness, the next the level was falling away down the hillside as if the bottom had dropped out of the valley. As the last dregs of the crater lake dribbled past them they saw again their land coldly etched in the moonlight.

They saw the swathe three hundred yards wide where every uneven object had been planed flat and covered with a drab blanket of sludge. They saw the ruin of their old house, and the blank mudflat where the new one had stood. And they saw each other, bruised, bedraggled, half naked. And Greg, holding his broken arm, his voice not quite steady, laughed.

"Aren't we lucky I hadn't done the painting?" he asked, and turned and held her with his good arm as, laughing and crying together, she buried her wet face in his sodden dressing-gown.

Later, looking back, Susan was never able to get a clear picture of the rest of that night. She remembered the moon going down, leaving them in the muddy half darkness of a hot summer night turned cold by shock and exhaustion. She remembered searching through the wreckage of the house and finding little except some furniture that was covered with inches of silt. She remembered the long struggle, under Greg's direction, to coax life out of the flooded engine of the truck, and she remembered not being strong enough to tear one of Joey's cot sheets to make a sling for Greg's arm.

But how long all this took, or in what order it happened, or what else she did, she never quite worked out . . .

The sky was copper and blue in the east as the old truck finally ground off, loaded with a mixed cargo of damp salvage.

Greg wanted to go up the valley to the Brandts to seek their help, but Susan firmly headed the truck the other way. Greg's arm had to be seen to—everything else could wait. That was what she said, and she knew she was right, and she wasn't doing it just because of the sense of bitterness that the thought of the Brandts seemed to rouse in her.

So she drove instead to the doctor. And the doctor's wife fed them and dried them while Greg was whisked off to the hospital. They had kept him there, and Susan had gone on with Joey and Kerry, driving through the morning to the house where Greg's parents lived. Driving along roads suddenly come alive with wailing police cars and ambulances and truckloads of men headed towards the devastation left by the flood.

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Then, at the home of Greg's parents, she remembered another doctor, a friendly, grey-haired man who had given her something to drink and put her to bed. And she remembered the warmth and the peace—and nothing more till the next morning.

Greg joined her two days later, his arm in plaster. He was full of bounce, and Susan, who had secretly been looking forward to taking care of him for a few days, began to wonder who would be looking after whom.

"Brandt came to see me in hospital," he told her while she was trying to fuss about his arm. "He's been down to look and he says most of the stock is all right. He's going to take care of things till we're organised."

"Then—we'll be going back?"

For a long moment he looked at her.

"I'll have to go back," he said slowly. "I'll have to get things straight again. After that—" He paused, as if exploring a fantastic new idea. "I rang the insurance. They'll pay out on the damage—we'll have a lump sum to start something else. Maybe a business or—"

"No." She put a cool finger on his lips. "I don't want to talk about anything else yet. Farming's your life and—oh Greg, I don't know what I do want."

He held her very tight, and when he spoke he seemed to be weighing every word.

"I know it's been terrible for you," he began haltingly. "This is our one chance—a clean break."

"No—"

"All right, we won't talk about it now. But when the time comes to decide, will you tell me—honestly—what you want?"

She looked up at him, and her green eyes were clouded.

"I promise," she said, very quietly.

Greg talked about going back within a few days, but his broken arm wouldn't knit, largely because he refused to rest it. He phoned Brandt several times, and every time Brandt told him that everything was just fine.

"I think he likes working two farms," Greg said one morning three weeks later. "He practically explodes if I suggest it's time I got back to work myself."

But a week after that Greg could stand the idleness no longer. Leaving the twins behind, they drove off early one morning and by midday they had left the main highway and were climbing the familiar dirt road towards the massive shadow-white of Ruapehu. And then, reaching a high crest, they stopped.

Before them lay the valley—their valley.

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The flood had left little sign. Only the patches of grey silt and the widely-scattered boulders spoke of the fury that had come and gone so quickly. Sheep grazed in the sunshine. The ruin of their old house stood, forlorn and tilted, just below the tide-mark where a line of debris marked the highest point the water had reached.

One thing in the valley had not been there before. On a spur before them, just below the crag where they had sheltered, a new house stood, a house the exact replica of the one that had been swept away. It was not quite complete. Around it stood a group of cars and trucks, while in and out and over the house swarmed a dozen or more men and women.

Bewildered, Susan recognised the Brandts' big oldfashioned open car, the new utility of the Grahams who farmed lower down the valley, and the green truck belonging to Hemi, the Maori carpenter who had been helping Greg. All the neighbours were there. Guiltily, Susan recognised two whose names she couldn't remember. Slowly she got out of the truck and walked towards the house.

As they saw her, the work stopped. It was Brandt who came to meet them.

"We had hoped to finish it," he said shyly. "Never mind, it's nearly ready. It's just like the other one—Hemi had the plans."

Susan took Greg's arm and held on tightly. Her legs felt weak, and the lump in her throat was nearly choking her.

"It's—it's perfect," she whispered. She looked round them all, and then she looked up at Greg, and her eyes were shining.

On the top of a ladder a figure stopped wielding a huge paint-brush, and under the overalls and splashes of paint Susan recognised Mrs. Brandt.

"This right, dear?" she called. "It says 'Paradise Blue' on the tin. I'd prefer a sensible brown myself—but I was sure this was what you'd want."

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SOLUTIONS to DROP SHOT on page 67

1. *Rosaline.* 2. *15 yards.* 3. *Harold* II. 4. *Harrow.*
5. *Among more than fifty articles were a set of British coins, a portrait of Queen Victoria, Bibles, Bradshaw, a shilling razor, a box of cigars and one of hairpins, a feeding-bottle, a dress-suit, a London directory, and photographs of a dozen English beauties.*
6. *Giant Redwood.* 7. *The Emperor Nero.*
8. *Bookworms.*

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ride on a broomstick

Most women, when they feel free to experiment with life, will go straight to the witches' Sabbath. I myself respect them for it, and do not think that I could ever really love a woman who had not, at some time or other, been up on a broomstick . . .

ISAK DINESEN, *The Old Chevalier*

She can walk invisibly at noon
Along the high road; but those other women
Gleam phosphorescent—broad hips and gross fingers—
Down every lampless alley.

She is wild and innocent, pledged to love
Through all disaster; but those other women
Decry her for a witch or common drab
And glare back when she greets them.

Here is her portrait, gazing sidelong at me,
The hair in disarray, the young eyes pleading:
"And you, love? As unlike those other men
As I those other women?"

ROBERT GRAVES, *The Portrait*

White Goddess

She silently drew near him, fixing him with her wondrous eyes. At that moment the lightning rent the cloud and flashed on her pale face. Was she the goddess who had risen before Giovanni's awestruck gaze from her tomb on the Hill of the Mill?

"'Tis she!" he thought in terror. "She has found me again, the White She-devil!"

He would have risen, but his forces seemed to have left him. He felt the girl's hot breath on his cheek, and listened as she whispered:—

"Will you that I reveal everything to you? Will you fly with me . . .?"

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A cold sweat broke out on Giovanni's brow, but curiosity impelled him, and in a low voice he asked:—

"Where?"

"*Al Sabbato!*" she answered with passionate languor, her lips almost touching his cheek.

DMITRI MEREJKOWSKI, *The Forerunner*

Lady of Witchcraft

I'll go to my chamber under the gable,
And the moon will lift her light
In at my lattice from over the moorland
Hollow and still and bright.

And I know she will shine on a lady of witchcraft,
Gladness and grief to see,
Who has taken my heart with her nimble fingers,
Calls in my dreams to me;

Who has led me a dance by dell and dingle
My human soul to win,
Made me a changeling to my own mother,
A stranger to my kin.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Bewitched*

Snow Sorceress

Against a background of harsh, dark blue, there stands out the figure of the Duchess. The dress is, with its mixture of silver and pearl, of a strange dull red, a wicked poppy-juice colour, against which the flesh of the long narrow hands with fringe-like fingers; of the long slender neck, and the face with bared forehead looks white and hard, like alabaster . . .

It snowed yesterday for the first time in the city, for two good hours. When it had done, I actually went into the square and taught the ragamuffins to make a snow-man; no, a snow-woman; and I had the fancy to call her Medea. "La pessima Medea!" cried one of the boys—"the one who used to ride through the air on a goat!" "No, no," I said. "She was a beautiful lady, the Duchess of Urbania, the most beautiful woman that ever lived." I made her a crown of tinsel and taught the boys to cry, "Evviva, Medea!" But one of them said, "She is a witch! She must be burnt!" At which they all rushed to fetch burning faggots and tow; in a minute the yelling demons had melted her down.

VERNON LEE, *Amour Dure*

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by Alan Scholefield

JOHN SOUTHEY, bachelor, Bede Professor of History at the University of Cape Town, picked at two poached eggs and a fried banana. He knew that Watch, who had cooked this dreadful mess, was observing him from some distance down the verandah, and it irritated him to know that he could neither look up from his plate—he did not want to see the anxious black face—nor push the food away, for this would lead to an argument, and in his present mood he might say something that would upset Watch, and for days would have to bear an atmosphere of martyred disapproval.

Southey had driven from Cape Town to the Zululand coast in a day and a half, and had needed a larger quota of gin and tonic than normal to take the ache out of his muscles.

Much to Watch's disgust, he had eaten no dinner, and now, instead of the solitary cup of strong black coffee for which his body longed, he would have to eat a cooked "blekfas" if he wished to avoid a domestic crisis. Watch was a strong believer in cooked "blekfas," cooked "lunshun," and cooked "dinnah," and whereas in his youth Southey had been thin as a rail, cooked "blekfas" had given him now, in his thirties, a slightly buoyant look about the middle, and the necessity to keep bismuth tablets handy during his first lecture.

He finished one egg, half a fried banana, pushed the plate away, and stood up. "I've had enough," he said shortly. Watch looked gloomily at the half-finished meal.

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They made a strange pair. Southey tall, dark, slightly round-shouldered, with wild black hair and an angular face, and the diminutive Watch, who was neatly almost fussily dressed, in clean white starched mess jacket and shorts, a stiff white chef's cap on his head, and newly-cleaned tennis shoes on his feet. He was about fifteen years older than Southey, and peppercorns of grey hair showed on his scalp where the cap did not cover it.

"Cap'n no like blekfas?" Watch queried sourly.

"Cap'n has eaten enough." Watch had never ceased to call him Captain since he had been Southey's batman during the war, and it gave them both a certain amount of harmless pleasure.

"Cap'n get thin again," Watch warned primly.

"I *want* to get thin again. Corpulence at my age is a sign of incipient decay."

His remark passed over the African. He had heard that sort of gibberish often enough.

"Cap'n drink too much in the night," Watch pointed out with unpleasant accuracy. "That why he no eat blekfas."

"Watch, you're an interfering—" At that moment he heard a step on the gravel path and swung round. Mrs. Fredericks was coming up the verandah steps.

"Take this stuff away," he said to Watch, "and bring some coffee." Then he turned to the young woman who was walking towards him.

"Good morning," he said, "It's a lovely day."

"Isn't it?" She smiled in the sunlight. "This is the best time of the year."

Lynette Fredericks was short, slim, with blonde hair cut like a boy's and a face that was too piquant for real beauty. But its attractiveness was undeniable. She was wearing a light yellow blouse and tailored whipcord slacks, and looked, Southey thought, about seventeen.

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"Will you take a cup of coffee, Mrs. Fredericks?" Southey caught himself asking sonorously.

"I really came to find out if you've enough linen and things. The people who rented the house before you only left in the morning and I didn't have time to go through the inventory."

He poured out a cup of coffee and handed it to her. "I'm sure Watch and I will be perfectly all right."

Southey found himself beginning to enjoy the first day of his holiday. His headache had left him and in its place had arrived this charming and attractive young woman. They talked generalities at first: she told him about the tiny holiday village of St. Margaret's Bay and they bickered amiably about life in a village and life in a big city, and each avowed a preference for the life the other led.

"If you prefer the city why not live in one?" Southey asked.

"Why don't you live in a village?"

"A matter of pure economics. But you—if you have such a strong desire to go back to Durban, why not put your houses in the hands of an agent? He could let them for you."

She smiled. "The way you say 'houses' makes me sound like a property owner. There are only two and I don't own them; Father does."

"Oh, I didn't realise . . ."

"Of course you didn't. You see, since I came to the Bay, I've handled the letting of the houses. It gives Father more time for fishing, which is the only thing he's really interested in. He always loved it but, being a police superintendent in Rhodesia, he didn't get much chance. That's why he retired down here and bought these houses. Now he can fish as much as he likes."

Southey lit a cigarette for her. "And your husband?" He wondered why men always used a carefully neutral tone when inquiring after the husbands of attractive women.

"He's dead," she said, "he was killed in a car crash a year ago."

"I'm sorry," Southey said, and meant it. She seemed hardly old enough to belong to one of his tutorials, yet she was already a widow.

"That's really why I came to the Bay," she said seriously, "but I'm all right now. Let's not talk about me," she added abruptly. "You're on holiday, after all. Three months! It's a long time."

He looked at her with amusement. "It's not quite a holiday, you know. Professors are supposed to be serious-minded beings, and the long vacation should be a time when they can pursue the more exclusive realms of learning."

Her grey eyes were quite serious. "And what work will you do here?" she asked.

Was she really interested or was it just good manners? "I'm doing a book on the history of Zululand, and I thought I'd combine business with pleasure, a sort of working holiday."

It sounded splendid when he put it like that. At the end of three months he wondered just what work he would have done.

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"Do you mean the Kaffir Wars and the early settlers? That sort of thing?"

"Not quite. Rather earlier than that. You see, there was contact between the white man and the African on this coast long before there was colonisation in the south." He could hear the lecture-room creep into his tone.

"In what way?"

"Shipwrecks."

"Here? I know about the *Grosvenor* farther down the coast and the *Birkenhead* near Cape Town, but not any others."

"These were hundreds of years before the *Grosvenor*. They were all Portuguese. Late in the fifteenth century Portugal sent men out to find Prester John and his fabulous kingdom in Africa, and also the King of Calicut. They found both.

"Prester John turned out to be the Emperor of Ethiopia and there was nothing fabulous about him at all. But in searching for the King of Calicut they found India—and that *was* fabulous, in terms of riches.

"As far as we know, it was about the middle of the sixteenth century that the first great Portuguese galleon was wrecked. And after that there were half a dozen more. All big ships carrying treasure and passengers.

"What interests me is just where these wrecks took place in relation to where the Bantu were living. You see, to get food the Portuguese bartered their possessions. So that if, for example, relics were found here in the possession of the natives, then we could say with certain justification that the migratory Bantu had reached here by that time. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes. And you think there was a wreck here?"

"As far as we know the greatest of all the Portuguese galleons, the *San João*, was wrecked just about here. She left Cochin on the third of February 1552 and we think she was wrecked on the twenty-fifth of June. Those are the dates given in the Portuguese histories.

"What makes the *San João* so important is that she was the first great treasure ship to come out of the plundered East. Her cargo, which was almost entirely gold, silver, and precious stones, was said to have been worth more than a million pounds."

She said, "And you're going to find it and be terribly rich."

"That's the general idea," he said and laughed.

"Have you any idea how you'll go about it?"

That was the question, Southey thought, that took a lot of answering. He had spent the last long vacation on the south coast of Spain and had been in Alicante when an Italian skin-diving team had come across the wreck of an ancient trireme in the bay. An expert swimmer himself, he had become interested. Skin-diving had been a hobby of his from his student days. He borrowed an aqualung and skin-diving apparatus, and had gone out with them.

And John Southey had entered a new world: the undersea

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world. It had gripped him like a vice. He had told himself that if there were wrecks in the Mediterranean still yielding up amphorae to the casual diver, then there might be important discoveries to be made on the coast of Africa where the wrecks had been lying for only a third of the time.

That's what he had told himself.

It was easy enough from that point to argue that work on the Portuguese wrecks would be an important contribution to Africana. But when all was said and done—and Southey was adult enough to recognise it—what it really meant was a holiday in the sun and a chance to explore this wonderland.

"I thought of diving," he said.

"You should meet Harry then," she said, "he's a fanatic about skin-diving."

"Who's Harry?"

"Harry Mendoza. He's the barman at the Panoramic Hotel."

After she'd gone, Southey sat for a moment in his chair. Something at the back of his mind was stirring. He tried to think, but nothing came. Then Watch bustled out of the house with a shopping list in his hand, and Southey said that he'd do the shopping as he wanted to look at the village . . .

Southey went up the steps of the shop whose sign read:

X. METAXAS, PROPRIETOR

and into the shadowy, packed interior.

Greek and Indian shops in South Africa contain everything that the average man might want in his lifetime except liquor—and even that can always be arranged between friends. This shop was no different.

Xenophon Metaxas was a heavy man. He wore a pencil behind one ear and thick heavy-rimmed glasses on his nose. His hair was black and oily, and on his fat jowls a day's growth of beard was visible.

He had been born forty years before in a stinking tenement in the Piraeus, had gone to sea as a cabinboy in one of the Greek Line ships, had deserted as soon as he felt he was sufficiently far from his native Greece, and nursed now only two ambitions: to make life as comfortable as he could and never to see the slum area of the Piraeus again.

He was standing behind the counter of his shop reading a day-old copy of a Durban paper and looked up as Southey came in.

He nodded briefly. "Can I help you?"

"I've got a list of the stuff I need," Southey said.

"Very well." Metaxas took the pencil from behind his ear, put a piece of carbon paper under a fresh page of his order book, and Southey began to intone the list of staples that would keep Watch and himself in flourishing health for the next week.

"Now is there anything else?" the Greek said, advancing from behind the counter. "I've got some lovely herrings, genuine Scotch herrings, selling like hot cakes." Southey shook his head. "Or razor blades, washing soap? The samoosas are hot, just out

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of the pan." Southey winced at the thought of the burning meat-and-chilli pattie exploding in his stomach.

"No, thank you, nothing more."

"What about some Cape Camembert? Just in this morning. Selling like hot cakes."

Southey hated being high-pressured. "I told you," he said somewhat shortly, "that I required nothing more."

Southey was not often rude but something in the Greek's manner was provocative. He looked up, and felt a sudden sense of shock at the naked hatred in the other man's eyes. Then they were lowered swiftly and the man bowed.

"As you wish, sir."

Southey felt confused and ashamed. He had been imagining things. Needlessly he had given offence. He cast about for something to say that would help, and saw a showcase filled with native curios. There was some beadwork and a few handmade woollen ties, but the bulk of the case was filled with clay busts of African men and women. They were of poor quality, cheap and unaesthetic.

"I say," he said with a semblance of enthusiasm, "those are rather nice."

"I'm glad you think so. We make them here on the premises." The Greek's voice was cold.

"Do you indeed? That's fascinating. I don't suppose it's possible for me to see the work, is it?" Now that he had embarked on this fantasy, Southey felt that he had to go on.

"If you wish," Metaxas said indifferently. He led Southey through the back of the shop and asked him to wait a moment. In a few seconds he was back. "Please come this way."

He took Southey to a shed at the bottom of a junk-filled yard. It contained a small oven for baking the clay, a big wooden container for the raw materials, and a bucket of black shellac. An African was moulding the heads from the grey river clay.

Southey watched for a few minutes and saw a tray of figures come out of the oven and another go in. After the figures had cooled the African slapped on the black paint and allowed them to dry. Nothing could have been simpler.

"Can you really sell such large quantities in a place this size?"

"We sell them all over the country, and we also have a large export trade. We have had orders from as far away as England and Australia. We are very well known."

"I must have one," Southey said heartily.

"If you wish." Metaxas bent down and picked one from a tray. "The paint is quite dry," he said.

Southey paid what he thought was more than three times the value of the object and took his leave. The Greek's face was quite expressionless. Out in the sunshine Southey looked at the ridiculous purchase he had forced himself to make and felt angry. He stuffed it into his jacket pocket and walked down the dusty street. He wanted a drink.

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Harry Mendoza had been barman of the Panoramic Hotel for more than five years. He was a big man, about eight years younger than Southey. He wore a white T-shirt which showed off his splendid neck and biceps to advantage. He looked, in fact, like a picture from a body-building magazine.

" Good day," Southey said, and sat on one of the high wooden stools, putting his jacket on its neighbour.

Harry looked up and studied him with his treacle-coloured eyes and nodded. " What'll it be? "

" Oh, pink gin, I think."

Harry turned away for the gin and Southey saw the big rounded shoulders and the muscles that moved under the tight shirt and thought that it would take a brave man or a fool to start anything in this bar. He took a sip of his drink and lit a cigarette. Harry was polishing glasses. There was no one else in the bar.

" They tell me you're the best skin-diver in these parts," he said pleasantly.

Harry breathed on a glass and went on polishing it. " Who's ' they? ' " he said.

" Well, Mrs. Fredericks."

Harry looked up sharply and for the second time that morning Southey sensed something inimical.

" You a friend of hers? " Harry asked carefully, putting the glass on the bar counter.

" No, not really. I only arrived here last night. I've rented one of her houses."

" Oh." The big body relaxed. He picked up another glass and began to polish it slowly. " Yes," he volunteered, " I do a lot of diving. The spear-fishing's good."

That's better, Southey thought, now we're actually *talking*. " What do you get around here? "

" The usual—red steenbras, black steenbras, mussel-crackers, shad, garrick, a lot of kob, grunters—the usual."

"Any big stuff? "

" Some."

" Have you taken any? "

" Some."

With relief Southey heard the telephone ring. He was getting just a little exhausted with one-sided conversations. Harry moved along the counter to answer it and Southey picked up his drink, went out on to the terrace, and sat down at a table under an umbrella. He felt for his cigarettes and then remembered his jacket. In the doorway he stopped. Harry had come round from behind the counter and had Southey's coat in his hands.

As the doorway darkened Harry looked up quickly. " You left your jacket," he said. " I was just bringing it to you."

Southey took the jacket in silence and went back to his table. He ran through the pockets: wallet, comb, fountain pen, cigarettes, everything was there. I'm getting hypersensitive, he thought.

He lit a cigarette and looked out over the village. The Panoramic

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Hotel was built on a high outcrop of rock that stuck out slightly into the bay. The bay, which was really a lagoon, was roughly horseshoe in shape and the hotel was situated just off centre at the back of the shoe. Southey was sitting facing the lagoon with the two points of the horseshoe in front of him, and he could see the surf breaking in the gap where the channel was.

Behind him on either side of the hotel stretched the village, on his right the beach curved round to one point and on his left the symmetry of the horseshoe was broken where the lagoon stretched farther than the eye could see, narrowing and becoming heavily bushed on both banks. From the right-hand point of the horseshoe, a jagged line of rocks stretched out to sea, and from where he was sitting the reef looked remarkably like a crocodile with the head facing towards him . . .

Crocodile Reef was about five hundred yards long. The tallest rocks were those of the head, then came a channel of water, then lower rocks which formed the body, then another channel of water, and finally the smaller rocks that formed the slightly-curving tail and which, from that distance, looked like stepping-stones.

On the farthest rock a man was fishing. Southey could just make out the tiny figure against the sea.

He finished his drink and went into the bar to pay. He was tempted to have another but it was almost lunch-time and Watch did not stand for vague meal hours.

" By the way," he said to Harry, " have you ever come across any coins or relics that might have come from a shipwreck? "

The barman looked up slowly. " Why, is there a wreck around here? "

" There may be."

Harry paused. " Are you going to look round for anything? "

Southey smiled. " I might. It's one way of getting rich."

" I'd be careful if I were you."

" Of what? "

Harry paused again. " Of sharks," he said.

Southey had planned a sleep for the post-lunch period and then a walk along the beach to the reef later in the afternoon. He accomplished the first easily enough but by the time he was ready for his walk an unpleasant gusty wind had sprung up which, he was assured, was quite unusual for this time of year. Instead, he tried to read. He had brought several big volumes with him but none could hold his attention, and after a dinner at which his only companion was Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, he began to feel bored.

" Watch," he called. " Take this note to Mrs. Fredericks. She lives in the white house along the lane."

He had written: *If you and your father have nothing better to do would you care to join me in coffee and liqueurs?* He thought " care to " sounded pompous and rewrote it " would you like " and then remembered that he had no liqueurs, only brandy, but by that

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time he had run out of paper so he just sent the note as it was.

He turned to the small African head which he'd placed on the mantelpiece. " Do you think they'll come, George? " he asked it. He walked across the room and looked at it carefully for the first time.

The head weighed about half a pound and stood four inches high. It was particularly amateurishly conceived. The eyes—one was higher than the other—stared widely into the middle distance, and above a beard that was the shape of a shovel the mouth turned up in a naïve and vacant smile.

I've brought an idiot into the house, Southey thought.

Watch came in with the reply. Southey read it. *Father's gone fishing for an hour or so. May I come?*

He wondered how much thought she had given to the last line, then wrote underneath it, *Of course—I'll put the coffee on.*

The wind had died at sunset and the evening was warm. They sat on the verandah. To discourage any mosquitoes, Southey had put on only a small reading-lamp in the lounge, and its slender light shining through the windows was all they had. Lynette Fredericks was wearing a white silk dress that set off her fair hair and brown skin.

They smoked for a while in silence looking out at the night, then he said, " I saw your skin-diver friend at lunch-time. I don't think one would call him an effusive conversationalist."

She smiled. " No, I don't think you would. Poor Harry. He's rather a nice person though."

" Why ' poor Harry? ' "

She hesitated. " Oh, nothing really. It's just that we've known each other for such a long time and then I left to get married and when I came back it wasn't the same any more. We'd both changed. Harry seemed to resent it."

" You knew him well, then? "

" Oh yes. Father first started coming down here when I was a child. Harry and I used to be inseparable. He taught me to swim and fish and how to ride the waves without a surfboard. I remember them as golden summers. I remember how much I wanted to be a boy and to be able to run and swim as fast as Harry."

" Do you ever see him now? "

" Occasionally. In the street or in a shop and we talk for a bit. But he seems uneasy—drawn into himself. Perhaps it is more difficult for someone like Harry . . . " She paused. " You see, he was a foundling. He was left on the doorstep of the Anglican Mission in Port Christie about forty miles from here. Father found out. He thought Harry was in love with me and went into his background."

"And was he in love with you? "

" Perhaps. A legacy of all those summers."

He gave them each another brandy. It seemed a time for confidences.

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The lights of the village gradually went out, drawing them closer together in the darkness.

" But you didn't marry Harry."

" No, I didn't marry Harry." She swirled the brandy round in the glass and looked into it. " I married Dave Fredericks instead."

In every university you come across the prototype of David Fredericks: handsome, charming, and with more money than good sense. He was the son of a Natal sugar baron and Lynette had met him in her last year at college. He was of the generation that might have taken as its legend, speed. He drove fast cars and bet on fast horses. They were married on her twentieth birthday.

Lynette lit a cigarette and said, " At first we were very happy. It seemed as though everything in the storybooks was coming true. I thought I was one of the lucky ones.

" On his twenty-fifth birthday Dave came into a substantial sum of money which was the interest on a trust fund, and the first thing he did was to buy a racing car. He didn't consult me—didn't even tell me. Just one day he had a racing car.

" It's strange the things one has to compete with. I had to compete with a lump of steel and rubber for his time and affection. I hardly saw him for days on end."

Although Southey had never watched motor-car racing, or followed it in the press, he had seen the name Fredericks often enough in bold headline type, and from what he could remember, recklessness had been one of his main attributes.

When Lynette became pregnant, Fredericks was delighted. He had always wanted a son.

She was five months pregnant when the False Bay 100, the South African classic, was held in Cape Town on New Year's Day. She had begged him not to enter, but he had insisted, and had also insisted that she come down with him and have a holiday at the Cape at the same time. This, he told her, was to be his final race.

" He was killed just in front of me," Lynette said, and her voice had become flat. " I can remember it quite clearly. He was driving a red Ferrari.

" He came round the bend where I was standing. I think he must have been coming round too fast. The car went into a skid and I saw the back wheel come off. The car spun into the crowd, but I think Dave was dead by then."

Lynette had fainted and only recovered consciousness in the ambulance taking her to hospital. Later that night she lost her baby.

When she had finished, Southey sat for a moment in silence—it was not often he found himself with nothing to say—and she stood up and said, " It's late. I must go. Forgive me."

He put out a hand and took her arm to guide her down the steps, and left it there as they walked down the lane. It did not occur to him to kiss her when he said good night. She was, he

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reminded himself thoughtfully as he walked back to his house, young enough to be one of his students.

Still deep in thought, Southey mounted the steps of the verandah and walked towards the door of the lounge. It was then that he noticed the reading-light was out, and the whole house in darkness. He assumed that Watch had been fussing around before going to bed. He walked into the room and felt his way along the wall to the switch. There was a slight noise.

Southey stopped. He listened carefully, but all he could hear was his own breathing. Then it came again, a sort of creak. There was someone or something in the room with him.

It came again. The creak that shoeleather gives.

"Watch," he said, "is that you?"

But it was not Watch, for as he said it he could feel someone behind him. He turned sharply, but too late; something was round his throat and was being pulled tight. He tried to shout but no sound came. There was a singing in his ears as the veins in his neck and head became distended. He tried to kick backwards but nearly lost his balance; tried to get his fingers under whatever was round his throat, but it was too tight.

Next to him was the window that overlooked the verandah. He was close enough. Using what remained of his strength he smashed at it sideways with his right hand. There was splintering and shattering of glass. The constriction round his neck lessened. He felt a blow on the back of his head that sent him stumbling forward into unconsciousness.

When he opened his eyes again all the lights in the house were on and Watch was bathing his face with a wet cloth.

Later, he sat in the lounge with a large brandy in his hand and struggled to sort things out.

Someone had tried to kill him. He admitted to himself that it sounded melodramatic, but that was what had happened. If this had been ordinary housebreaking, the thief would either have vanished as Southey returned or else hit him over the head. But someone had tried to strangle him.

Why?

He took a long pull at the brandy and turned to the African head on the mantelpiece. "Why should anyone want to kill me?" he asked of it. It did not reply. "That's right," Southey said sourly. "Just go on smiling your stupid smile."

But it wasn't smiling either. Southey frowned and crossed the room. He picked it up in his hand. There was something odd about it. It did not seem to be the same curio that he had bought earlier that day . . .

When Southey woke next morning after a night of troubled dreams he was tempted to add reality to them. In this way he could escape the responsibility of even thinking about what had happened. But the soreness at his throat was too real for that. He got out of bed and went into the lounge.

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The native curio was still there and now he was not sure at all if this was in fact the one he had bought or not. He was not sure of anything. He ate a quick breakfast under the sharp eyes of Watch, then gathered up his skin-diving equipment and struck off along the beach for the reef.

It was a creamy, still morning with no trace of the " coaster "—as the locals described the gusty wind—of the day before.

As he plodded through the heavy white sand he wondered if the police would discover anything at all. At the time they had been almost the last people Southey had thought of, so little faith did he place in the constabulary of tiny fishing villages, but Watch had been adamant and had gone into the village for the constable on duty. Southey had had to give him his statement and as he was an African constable it had taken an exhaustingly long time. He had said nothing of the curio: one reason was that he was not sure and the other was that it would simply have served to confuse an issue that was in itself confused enough.

In thirty minutes he came to the beginning of the reef. The tide was low and the water-levels in the dividing channels had dropped. He picked his way over the rocks that formed the head of the crocodile, then waded into the first channel. The water boiled and foamed as the waves raced in. It came up to his waist and he felt his way over the channel bed with his feet.

The second channel was not quite so deep, but it was wider. One would have to be almost fanatical about fishing, he thought, to come out here every day.

Edward Harvey-Greig stood on one of the farthest rocks, his big glass-fibre sea rod held firmly in the leather bucket at his waist. This was his favourite fishing spot and he was a man who knew many. He lived for fishing.

True, he had loved his wife when she was alive, and had been happy with her, and he loved his daughter Lynette and was glad she was living with him now, but real contentment seemed to come to him only when he was alone.

He was a stocky, powerful man of sixty-five who wore khaki shorts above his muscular legs. His hair was thin and white and blew all over his head in the light sea breeze.

Harvey-Greig was a self-sufficient anchorite who did not like strangers at any time and in particular when he was fishing. He watched Southey's progress towards him with growing irritation. Then he saw the speargun and the underwater equipment and his brow darkened in anger. He had seen a shoal of herring go flashing into the bay that morning and he knew that the big sea bass—or kob as they were called on this piece of coast—would be coming in after them. Harvey-Greig was very fond of a bit of fried kob.

" Good morning," Southey said, wading through the last few yards of the channel. " Beautiful day for fishing. Got anything? "

Harvey-Greig snorted. " What the hell've you got there? " he snapped, pointing at the speargun.

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" Oh, I just fool about with these. You wouldn't be Mr. Harvey-Greig, would you? "

The old man nodded his head angrily. " Of course I am."

Southey introduced himself as his new tenant. " Your daughter told me I would find you out here at almost any time."

" I don't care what she told you," he broke in rudely, " you've no right to bring that murderous bloody equipment. We don't like spear-fishermen on this reef."

Southey smiled to himself. What Harvey-Greig meant was that *he* didn't like spear-fishermen. He couldn't imagine the old man tolerating any fisherman on his private preserve even if it were only a small boy with cotton and a pin trying for periwinkles.

" I thought there was quite a lot of skin-diving in these parts," Southey said as he drew on his flippers. " Your daughter told me that the barman of the Panoramic was very good."

Harvey-Greig tied a fresh piece of squid on to the long-shank kob hook with infinite care and said flatly, " Harry knows better than to come out here." Then he stood up, took up the slack on his big Ocean City reel, and in one movement cast the bait and lead sinker well out into the calm sea.

Southey spent about two hours in the water, on what might have been ironically described as historical research. He had reasoned that if the great Portuguese galleon had tried to enter the bay's safe anchorage she would very likely have gone on to the rocks of Crocodile Reef—and that was enough excuse for diving. He worked his way back along the reef about fifty yards out to avoid the pull of the current.

He saw no wrecked galleons—had never expected to—but he saw fields of waving seaweed, glistening starfish, sea flowers, anemones, branch coral, and lazy milk-fish that drifted in the water like cotton seeds. He shot nothing; he never did. The speargun was there only for protection.

Southey came out of the water and lay on the sun-warmed rocks. Harvey-Greig was still fishing, but now at his feet there were three shining bass, the biggest of which would run to eight or nine pounds.

" So you got nothing," the fisherman greeted him, and Southey could see the satisfaction in his eyes.

" No. They're too quick for me."

" There's only one way to fish and it's not with one of those things. If you're really interested I'll teach you one day."

Harvey-Greig's success and Southey's failure had mollified the older man. " That would be fine," Southey said.

" Tide's on the turn. We'd best get going." Harvey-Greig reeled in his line, entered his catch in his plastic-bound fishing diary, collected his canvas fishing-bag and bait tin, and they made their way back along the reef.

They walked across the white beach and Harvey-Greig talked fishing. As they came into the village he said to Southey, " Feel like a beer before lunch? " They went into the bar.

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"Two beers," the old man ordered brusquely, "and make them cold."

They drank for a moment in silence and then he said, "My daughter tells me you're after treasure. What makes you think there's any round here?"

Southey smiled. He was being exaggerated into something like an adventurer. "No, not really. I'm only interested from the historical point of view."

"And you think there might have been a wreck here?"

"Some historians say a Portuguese treasure galleon was wrecked about here."

"What about it?" He turned to Harry. "You go in for this diving nonsense. Have you seen anything?"

The big barman looked up from the newspapers he was reading. "No, not a thing," he said shortly.

Harvey-Greig took another long drink of beer. "Funny you should mention treasure and wrecks and that sort of thing. I've often thought that the reef must have taken its toll of shipping at some time. But I've never noticed anything that would substantiate a wreck there." He paused. "That is, until fairly recently."

"What was that?"

"Just a piece of wood that was washed up on the reef. The way it was carved made me think it must have been very old. I wondered then if a ship might have gone aground on the reef."

"Could have floated in from anywhere," Harry broke in. "The Arabs still go in for carved woodwork on their dhows."

But if Harvey-Greig heard him he gave no sign of it. "And then there have been other things," he said, half to himself, "at night."

"What sort of things?" Southey prompted.

"Well—" Harvey-Greig cleared his throat and Southey could sense that the old man was embarrassed—"it might sound fanciful, and you know when you're fishing at night you can easily start imagining a lot of things, but I've had a feeling some nights that the reef is—well—haunted if you like."

"In what way?"

"Look at the time!" Harvey-Greig said suddenly. "I promised Lynette I'd be home for lunch. But if you're still interested, why not meet me here about eightish for a drink?"

"I'd like to."

But Edward Harvey-Greig was not there at eightish or even at nine. Southey waited in the bar until a quarter past nine, talking desultorily to Philip Abrahams, the owner, Harry having gone off with a sick headache in the afternoon, then he decided to give it up. Harvey-Greig had either forgotten, thought better of it, or gone back to the reef and got among a shoal of sea bass.

Southey walked up the dusty road to his house, feeling the first bite of the wind tugging at his shirt and trousers. When he

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passed Harvey-Greig's house the light was on, and on an impulse he walked up the path and knocked at the door.

The maid opened it. Neither the master nor Miss Lynette were at home. He had gone out fishing at about six o'clock and Miss Lynette was in Port Christie.

Southey thanked her and took himself off to bed. He lay reading for a time, listening to the growing rush of the wind under the eaves. And then the thought came to him: What if the old man had slipped and fallen out there on the reef, and was injured? The tide was coming in. Southey thought about that because it was the sort of idea he often had about himself, and he could not now get it out of his mind.

Southey struggled with the idea for an hour before he got up, and he cursed himself for every sort of imaginative fool as he went along the road to the beach.

The reef lay black and sinister in the moonless night. The seas were big and the air filled with driving spray. He was soon wet through. He picked his way slowly along the glistening jagged rocks. His hair was plastered against his skull and his wet shirt flapped like a torn sail.

Stumbling, cursing, slipping on sea moss that was not visible in the darkness, Southey scrambled along the reef. His trousers were torn and his right hand scratched by a black mussel. He crossed the first channel without difficulty but when he reached the second he stopped. The water boiled in and out and he could see the tide rips. "Greig," he shouted. "Greig!"

The wind whipped the words away from him before they had left his throat, and he could barely hear them himself.

"Greig! Are you there?" There was no answer.

He was cold, wet, and he did not want to enter that churning, heaving water. Harvey-Greig might be back home by now, almost certainly was. And yet . . . As he made his way along the reef he had been turning over in his mind the events of the past two days—the attack, the native head, the talk of haunting by a cool-headed ex-policeman. He could make no sense out of them. And why hadn't Harvey-Greig kept his appointment?

He waded in cautiously, feeling his thighs tighten as they took the strain of the water. When he came out at the other side he was exhausted. "Greig," he called, "where the hell are you?"

Then he saw the fishing-bag and it was as though a cold finger had touched him under the heart.

It was wedged in between the rocks, and beyond it in a tangle of nylon lay the big glass-fibre sea pole. Southey scrambled on to the outer reef and shouted into the sea and wind, but he knew it was hopeless. If Harvey-Greig had been washed off the rocks he would have no hope with the sea running as it was.

He stood looking down at the sea rod and the bag, wondering what he could do. His teeth were chattering with cold but he was also cold from something else: the bleak, hostile, wind-lashed peninsula that was Crocodile Reef.

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Steel glittered in a rock pool at his feet. He bent closer and saw that it was Harvey-Greig's bait knife. He put his hand into the pool to retrieve it. The water was deeper than he had thought. He knelt on the edge and pushed his arm in up to the elbow.

For the first time he noticed a shadow next to the knife. His flesh crawled. He started to withdraw his arm but he was too late. There was a sudden movement in the pool and something wet and slimy closed on his arm.

He gave a shuddering scream and jumped backwards, jerking his arm up. But the patch of shadow at the bottom of the pool came with him and the dripping brown tentacles reached for his face. He felt the suckers clamp on to his cheeks and neck, then he wrenched free and smashed his arm down on a rock and smashed again and again till he could feel the seacat lose its hold and fall off.

The evil quality of the black reef, the enmity of wind and sea,

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and now the sudden horror of the encounter with the seacat, all combined to make Southey uneasy. He turned his back on the rocks and began the struggle to the beach. He fought the sea and the rocks and the shadows between the rocks and the wind until finally he reached the beach. He flung himself down in the sand and lay there until his strength began to return.

That was where Lynette found him.

She had gone into Port Christie that day for supplies and had stayed to catch the last cinema show. It was a forty-mile drive down the coast and so it was well after midnight when she arrived home. Her father was not there. Normally she would not have worried—sometimes he stayed out all night if there was a big run on—but she had felt the buffeting of the wind in the car and had seen the whitecaps racing up the beach from the coast road.

She had slipped a flask of brandy into the pocket of her leather jacket and gone out into the driving wind, hoping to meet him on his way back from the reef. But she did not.

Just before she reached the first rocks she saw a figure lying on the sand. She ran forward thinking it was her father and then stopped, shocked, when she saw Southey's condition.

She bent over him, raising his head with her left arm. "Here," she said, "drink this." As the brandy reached his stomach, Southey held on for a second, then the initial feeling of nausea passed into one of warmth.

"What happened?" she asked. "Are you all right? Where's Father?"

Southey stood up somewhat shakily. Given any choice he would rather have told her what he had to tell her the next day, given any choice he would rather not have told her at all. But he had no choice.

She stood with the wind whipping at her short blonde hair and her jacket wide open and her dress pressing against her taut body, and listened. Southey had half expected her to break down, but

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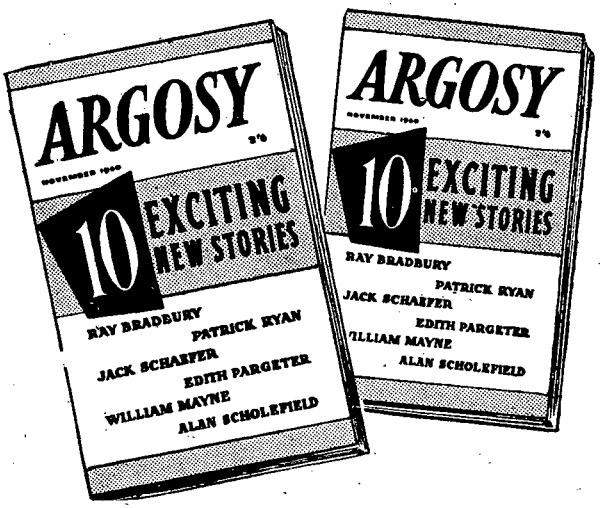

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she did not, and he realised that this was not the time or the place for tears. They would come later.

She did not say one word until he had finished, then she looked at him, and her mouth was twisted in bitterness. "My God," she shouted into the wind, "and you left him."

"Don't be silly. There was nothing I could do."

"You left him there to drown." Her voice had risen above the roar of the sea. "He might have been in the water right then, and you left him. You ran—you just ran."

"Don't be a damn fool," Southey said angrily, "I did what I could. There was just no hope."

"Well, I'm not afraid," she said. "I'm going out."

"No, you're not. No one's going out. It's senseless. The channels are running like flooded rivers."

"I don't care," she said. "I don't care." And she turned from him and ran on to the reef.

Every muscle in Southey's body shouted its individual protests as he dodged back among the rocks after her. He caught her by the arm but she wrenched away from him.

"Leave me!" she cried. But he caught her again and held her now with both hands.

"Easy," he said. "Easy. If you want to go I'll take you. But go easy or you'll break a leg."

They went out together on to the reef and if there had not been two of them they could never have managed it. Southey's tiredness had vanished with the responsibility of getting her there and back, and when they finally returned to the beach he seemed less exhausted than the first time. But the emotional shock and the physical effort had left Lynette weak and semi-hysterical. She had stood on the outer line of rocks and shouted and shouted into the breaking waves until Southey had had to drag her back. Now he slung the old man's fishing-bag over his shoulder, put one arm round Lynette, and they struck off along the beach back to the village.

For the remainder of the night she slept in Southey's bed and Watch sat in the room with her like a mother hen. Southey got what sleep he could on the divan in the lounge.

Watch forced them both to eat "cooked blekfas" and Southey admitted to himself that for once Watch was right. They could not have gone on much longer without the hot food. After they had eaten Southey went to the police and reported to Head Constable Celliers that Harvey-Greig was missing.

Within half an hour of taking Southey's statement, a small search party had been organised. The wind had dropped and the sea, except for the biggish swell that was already lessening, seemed to belie the terrors of the night before. The sun shone.

They found Harvey-Greig's body about noon. It had been washed up in the lagoon and lay half in and half out of the water in a patch of reeds. Southey was thankful that Lynette was not with them. It was not a pretty sight, especially the face and head.

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They took the body back to the police station and, as there was no mortuary in the Bay, placed it in the one small cell.

Lynette was still at the house when Southey got back. She was sitting pale but dry-eyed on the couch just staring at the far wall. As Southey came in she looked up and asked, " Did you—? "

He nodded. " In the lagoon."

" I see." She said it quite stiffly. Then suddenly she bowed her head into her hands.

Southey supposed that while her father's body had remained undiscovered she had still nursed some hope. Now that was gone. He crossed to the couch and sat down beside her, putting his arm about her shoulders.

At first she resisted, then her body seemed to relax and she turned to him, putting her head against his chest, and began to cry. Inadequately, it seemed to him, all he could do was to pat her on the back over and over again until finally she was still. Even after she had stopped crying they sat like that for a long time until she said, " Have you a handkerchief? Mine's soaked."

He gave her a clean silk handkerchief from his jacket pocket and she dabbed her eyes and cheeks and then tucked it back into his pocket again. It was such a gesture of familiarity and trust that Southey felt his heart wrench.

She said, " I've been going through Father's things in the fishing-bag. I read his diary. I suppose that made me feel worse. But there are some strange entries in it that I can't work out." She handed him the plastic-bound fishing diary.

It started in 1927 when Harvey-Greig had first come down to St. Margaret's Bay. The ink had faded but the writing was still legible. Each entry was precise yet detailed. And so it went on through the years.

" They start here," she said, and she flicked over the pages until Southey found himself reading an entry that was only a few months old. It came just after one which said: *Heavy sea. Coaster blowing. No fishing.* Then the next day, or rather night, was entered as: *Fished from 9-10 p.m., light sea, no moon. Two red roman. 4 lb., 2½ lb. Saw small light, shouted, no reply.*

About a fortnight later there was a similar entry on a night of thin mist. Altogether there were eight entries referring to lights that the old man had seen, and Southey knew in an instant that this was what Harvey-Greig wanted to tell him in the bar. In some cases he gave a rough position. The lights seemed about four hundred yards away, more or less straight in line with the reef. The entries were similar in two respects. Harvey-Greig always seemed to see the lights on a night after a big blow, and when there was either no moon or a sea mist.

" I can't think what they're all about," Southey said, staring at the book, " but they meant something to your father. He was going to tell me about them last night."

At that moment he heard the screen door slam. He looked up. Harry Mendoza stood in the doorway.

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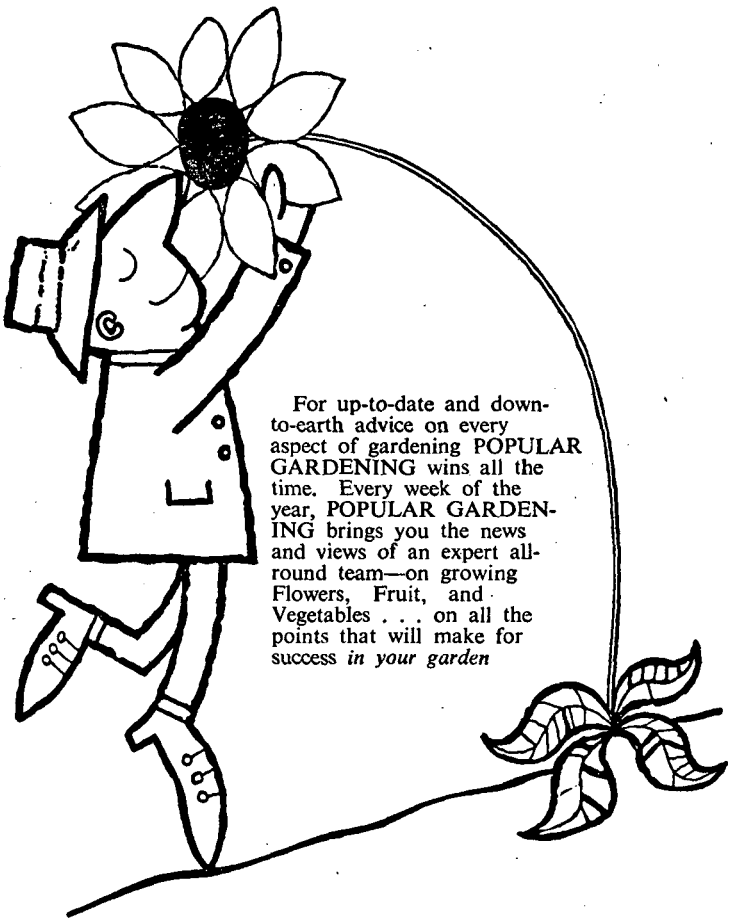

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Mendoza nodded coldly to Southey, then turned to Lynette. "I came as soon as I heard, Lyn. Is there anything I can do?"

She smiled at him. "Thanks, Harry. But I'm all right now. Mr. Southey has done everything."

"You're very lucky to have Mr. Southey," he said dryly.

Southey ignored this. "By the way," he said, "did Mr. Harvey-Greig ever discuss with you lights and things he had seen off the reef at night?"

"What sort of things?"

Southey watched him carefully. "A small boat, say, with a lamp on it?"

"No. Could have been a fishing-boat. They use a lamp to get bait."

"But there haven't been any fishing-boats here since the mouth of the Bay silted up," Lynette broke in.

"I meant from Port Christie. They sometimes come up as far as here."

"Yes," Southey said. "That's probably what it was—a fishing-boat."

Harry turned to Lynette again. "Well—" he hesitated—"if there's nothing I can do . . . I'll see you later, then."

"All right, Harry. And thank you."

"Good-bye." He did not even glance at Southey as he left.

Southey went back to the diary and stared at the pages.

"There's something about these that I don't understand. Your father was a policeman. They're used to writing things down in books, and they don't write things down unless they're important. So let's assume that they're important. Where do we go from there?" And then the thought came to him—perhaps it might be better to go back than to go forward.

He told her what had happened on his first night, and about the African's head and his suspicions.

"You say you bought it at the Greek's and then came straight down here and put it on the mantlepiece?"

"Yes. No, wait. That's not quite true. I went for a drink at the Panoramic and—" The picture flashed into his mind again. He saw Harry holding his jacket, not in the way someone holds a jacket to carry it. And he remembered the telephone call.

"And?" she queried.

He turned on her quickly. "If Harry was a foundling why should anyone have christened him Mendoza—why not Smith or Brown or any common name? Why Mendoza?"

She looked at him, puzzled.

"What on earth has that got to do with it?"

"Never mind now, just answer my question if you can."

"Well, yes, I think I can. Harry was named Christie after the town. Harry Christie. He started calling himself Mendoza when he was about eighteen. I asked him once but he wouldn't tell me, so I didn't bother after that. I assumed it was some fictional hero from a book or a film."

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"Well, I think I can tell you one thing—it wasn't any fictional hero."

"For heaven's sake! Stop acting like Hercule Poirot, and explain."

"Not right now," he said, getting to his feet and looking out into the mid-afternoon sky. "I'm going out to the reef. I want to find out something and I've only a couple of hours before dusk. I'll tell you when I get back."

"I'm coming with you," she said.

"Not this time. Get some rest; you need it."

"No, really—" she began.

And he said, "Yes, really," and smiled at her, and then gathered up his skin-diving equipment and went out of the door.

She stood quite still for a moment, then said, "Take care of yourself," in a voice that scarcely carried across the room.

After a while she went to the mantelpiece and took down the African head. She began to look at it carefully.

John Southey stood on the farthest point of Crocodile Reef that summer afternoon, took his bearings, and then launched himself smoothly into the sea. He was wearing a mask, snorkel, and flippers, and he had his speargun. He swam slowly, looking down at the dim ocean bed, surfacing regularly to make sure that he was keeping in a direct line with the reef. When he estimated his distance from the point of the reef at four hundred yards he stopped, rested on his back for a few minutes, then began to dive.

He planed down through the light green water until he could get a good view of the seabed, and began to swim in increasing circles.

The towering rock cathedrals, the acres of seagrass, the baleful snout of a conger eel in its hole had little or no interest for him now. At intervals he lay on his back, keeping himself afloat by the gentle movement of his flippers, then when he was breathing normally again he let himself drift down into the green shadows.

He worked for about an hour, not sure what he was looking for, but certain of recognising it when he found it.

And he did find it.

It was a sandbank.

Southey swam towards it and saw the seabed rising to meet him. He tried to stand, but the depth of water was too great. At dead low neaps he knew there would not be more than a fathom of water above it. It was white and sparkled in the sunshine and it looked innocent enough—just innocent enough to grip the keel of a heavily-laden ship and hold it fast while a stormy sea battered it to pieces.

He skimmed down and swam along the length of the sandbank, but there was nothing to see except sand: nor had he expected anything more. On this coast a wooden hulk would not last long. He swam the length of the sandbank and then began to quarter it like a dog in bracken. To his right he saw a smudge of

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darkness against the sand and went down towards it. But even as he did so he realised that it was his own shadow on the seabed.

Then he saw that there were two shadows. His own was directly beneath him, moving with him as he swam to where the water deepened. He felt suddenly cold in the tropical water.

He kicked sharply with his flippers, twisting his body at the same time.

The man was almost on top of him, coming down fast. Southey saw the knife in his hand: a short, dirty oyster knife that would rip him open like a bayonet. Him? He wanted to shout that there must be some mistake, but his teeth were jammed to the mouthpiece of the snorkel. Bubbles came from his mouth and he felt the salt water on his tongue.

He caught the knife wrist with his left hand and hung on with all his strength, which by then was not considerable. His chest began to ache with the breath he was holding. But fear, like insanity, produces its own sort of strength.

Their bodies turned over and over, writhing and whirling into the sand so that puffs of it sprang up into the water like miniature explosions as they swayed and fought. Southey hung on as hard as he could, and kept the knife point from driving those last six inches into his flesh.

His ears began to crack like a hot engine. He felt a hand clamp down on his speargun and lift it. He had forgotten the weapon hanging from a cord round his waist. He fought for it like a terrier, but his strength was leaving him. Their bodies closed. Southey felt the sudden buck and kick of the heavy rubber bands of the gun, felt the pressure on his arms relax. He kicked hard for the surface.

Harry Mendoza hung in the water like a spaceman, a look of enormous surprise on his face. He was looking down at the butt of the silver spear that somehow, not according to any plan he had made, had entered at a point just below his groin and had gone right through his left thigh.

From both punctures blood was beginning to seep. It trailed down the current like red smoke in a still room: a dark solid colour near the body, getting lighter as it spread through the water.

Southey grabbed him under the arms and worked his flippers like pistons until both their heads broke the surface.

The late afternoon haze was so thick that he could barely make out the point of the reef. He gathered what strength he had left and began the long laden swim to the rocks.

Before he had got halfway there his breath was coming in rasping sobs, but never for a moment did he think of letting Harry's unconscious body slide into the dark water below. In a strange way Southey felt responsible for him. It was his spear that was through the body.

He tried not to think about the sharks that would come racing to them as the blood spread.

There are many types of shark off that part of the African

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coast: there are the lazy greys, the ragged tooths, the hammer-heads, the tigers, the blue pointers, and all of them are maneaters.

He swam on slowly, pulling Harry with him, and as slowly, more so, it seemed to Southey, the distance between him and the reef began to grow less.

He stopped frequently to rest and to peer down into the rapidly darkening sea for signs of predators. Once he thought he saw the grey shape of a big shark beneath them, but then it moved and Southey recognised it as a sea bass.

The sharks did not come. Perhaps they were too well fed, perhaps the smell of the blood never reached them. Whatever the reason, they never appeared at all.

Southey felt, at last, the rough surface of rock beneath his feet. He edged himself up until he could stand, then began to pull Harry out of the water after him. Suddenly there was a flash of silver near his leg. He flung himself sideways and watched the shape go hurtling by. He stumbled backwards pulling Harry to safety.

He saw the fish cruise past more slowly this time. It wasn't a shark, that he knew. He eased Harry farther up the rocks and then lay on a shelf and looked through his mask into the water.

What he saw frightened him badly. Between thirty and forty barracuda moved gently in the current. They hovered in a semi-circle round the rock, their lean ferox-jaws, which housed teeth like scalpels, all pointed towards him.

There wasn't much he could do about them except wait. Sooner or later they would vanish. He went up to where Harry lay and tried to make him more comfortable. The spear had a screw tip so that it could be withdrawn from an impaled fish without damaging the flesh too much. Southey knew he could unscrew the barbed point and pull the thin shaft from Harry's thigh but that might mean a sudden rupture of the main artery and he decided it was safer to leave it where it was.

Harry was conscious. His lips were moving. Southey bent over his chest to hear what he was trying to say. At first he could make out nothing. Then the cloudy eyes cleared for a moment. " I'm dying, aren't I? "

" Of course not. They'll be able to take that out all right." He wasn't too sure who " they " were but at least it was something to say from which Harry might draw comfort. Southey did not think it odd that he should be trying to comfort someone who had almost killed him.

" No," Harry said. " I know." His eyes grew cloudy once again.

There were patches of lucidity, patches of incoherence, and times when Harry lay quietly unconscious. The sun sank into the sea haze and the breeze grew chilly. Since their landing on the rocks, Southey had twice stretched out on the shelf and looked into the water. The barracuda were still there.

" Shark? " Harry asked once after Southey had looked, and Southey shook his head.

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" Barracuda," he said.

" That's worse. You'll never make the channel. We'll die here together." Southey was not convinced of that. Lynette would start to worry as soon as it grew dusk. She would come out and he could shout across the channel. She would get a dinghy.

The wind rose by degrees, and Southey got down into the rocks next to Harry. " Well, that's what you wanted, isn't it? "

The other man nodded slowly.

" It's because of the sandbank, isn't it? "

" Yes. That's why we watched you."

"And the old man knew too. That's why he died. He wasn't just washed off the rocks, was he? "

" No, he wasn't washed off."

Southey got the story out of him in snatches. Harry was convinced that neither of them would live, and after a bit he talked freely. Some of it Southey had guessed, some he did not know.

" Please, missus," Watch was saying in his most plaintive tone, " what Cap'n Jack going to do to an old man like me? Cap'n Jack say you to stay here, I to look after you."

Lynette smiled at him. " It's all right, Watch, I'm not going to run away. I'm just going down to the store."

Watch shook his head sadly. Then he brightened. " Tea," he said. " I make nice cup of tea."

Lynette hesitated. " Very well, then. Let's have some tea."

Happily, his duty to the Cap'n done, Watch scurried out to the kitchen. As soon as Lynette heard the clink of the kettle against the tap, she took up her handbag and slipped out into the street.

A big Diesel truck stood outside the shop of Xenophon Metaxas. It was loaded with boxes and the African assistant was spreading a canvas sail over them. The Greek stood on the ground giving instructions in English. In his hands he held the ends of the three thick ropes that would be thrown over the load and tied down to keep it from shifting.

He looked up at Lynette's approach and smiled at her. " Good afternoon, my dear," and there was an emphasis on the last two words that gave her an unpleasant feeling at the back of her neck.

" Good afternoon, Mr. Metaxas," and she in turn emphasised the word " Mister."

" What can I do for you? " Again there was the suggestion of innuendo. Lynette flushed.

" I want some things from the store."

" Well, go in, my dear. Help yourself. I'll take *your* word for it." He smiled again. " I'll be in when we've finished here."

There was no one else in the shop. In the waning afternoon light it was dark and filled with shadows. She looked for the doorway that Southey had described, and swiftly and silently moved round the end of the counter.

She paused, and then went through the doorway into the littered yard. She walked quickly to the shed at the far end and slowly

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pushed open the door. It creaked loudly as it swung inwards and she waited, holding her breath. But nothing moved inside the shed. She went in.

It was as Southey had explained. She saw the small baking ovens, the big tub with the clay, and the buckets that contained the paint. She saw no African curios anywhere. The ovens were warm, but the fires had been banked and she could unhook the doors and look inside. There was nothing there either. Nor was there anything in the drying trays or behind the clay tub or near the paint buckets that would give her a clue in her search.

She went farther into the shed. It was also a storeroom for the shop and there were boxes of tinned fruit and tinned fish and candles and paraffin. She looked behind them and into the ones whose lids were open and which were partly empty. But they contained nothing except the goods advertised on their sides.

At the back of the shed she saw a cupboard. The door was locked but the bolt on the other door had not been secured, so that by pulling the doors towards her she was able to force the tongue of the lock from its socket.

The top shelf was packed with small crucibles. The middle shelf contained fire irons and crucible-tongs, and on the bottom shelf was a big leather bellows. She reached her hand up to take down one of the crucibles. At that second she heard the creak of the door. She swung round.

Someone was standing in the doorway.

The barracuda were lying much nearer the surface now. Southey could make out the hostile shapes as silver smears in the dark choppy sea.

"Still there?" Harry said.

"Yes."

"You haven't got a hope. This is a coaster coming up, and it's almost spring tide. These rocks will be under water in two hours. You don't think the fish know that?"

"We'll get off. Lynette knows I'm here. She'll come out soon and I can tell her to get a dinghy."

"No one knows there's a channel through the surf except me. I found it. She'll not be bringing any dinghy out."

"Then she can get help from the village. Perhaps they could rig a bosun's chair." But Southey was not quite so confident now.

And then the thought seemed to come to them both at the same time, and Harry's hand gripped Southey's arm. "But in any case she'll never hear you in this wind," he said hoarsely.

Southey knew he was right. Lynette would come out and she would not hear him warning her of the channel. And the light was already so bad that Southey doubted whether she would see clearly enough to understand a warning gesture.

The grip on his arm became harder. "You've got to do something, man. You've got to stop her." Then the grip relaxed. The hand fell away and Harry was unconscious again.

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How? Southey thought. How?

He tried to remember all he knew about barracuda. None of it was comforting. They were scavengers running to about twenty or thirty pounds with teeth on them like an alligator's. He remembered reading accounts by Hans Hass and Cousteau—and if he remembered correctly they had been more wary of barracuda than shark. Perhaps it was because they hunted in packs, like the wild dogs of Africa.

Southey went out on to the highest point of the rock and strained into the misty dusk for a glimpse of Lynette. If she came now there was a chance of stopping her. If she came in half an hour, or even fifteen minutes. . . .

He felt a sudden lash of spray at his back. A wall of foaming water rushed over the point of the reef. Southey ducked and hung on to the rocks. The wave hit him, pulling at his body, but the force had already grown weak and it did not break his grip. He shook his head to clear it of water. Harry was right. Soon the waves would wash the point completely. He hurried down to where he had left Harry to bring him on to higher ground.

Harry was not there. He looked about the wet rocks wondering if he'd mistaken the place. Another wave hit the point and he wedged himself into a crevice while the water pulled and pushed at him. He could not see Harry anywhere.

"Harry!" he called. "Where are you?"

And then he saw him. He had been washed off the rocks and his body, sucked along by the current, was already about thirty yards from the reef. He scrambled down towards the water and was just about to dive when he saw the first barracuda streak up to investigate.

He watched, sickened, as the others tore after it in a pack. He watched as the first one hit, sending the body spinning in the water . . .

Then the thought came to him—this was his chance.

He hit the channel in a racing dive and was thrashing his arms in a driving crawl even before his head broke the surface. He had taken his flippers off on the rocks and his feet felt curiously naked, lacking their usual power. He swam as he had never swum before. Head down. Blood pounding in his ears. Arms going like turbines. Hands like paddle-wheels.

He swam for his life.

In that fifty-yard dash he raised his head to breathe only once, then tucked it down between his shoulders and let his back muscles pull him through the water.

He swam right up on to the rocks, feeling the barnacles and spiky sea-urchins tear at his hands and chest, feeling the thud at his right leg as the first barracuda reached him, missed, and struck the rock.

Then he was safe and the barracuda fell back stunned into the water. The others were on it like a pack of dogs ripping and tearing at it . . .

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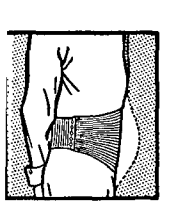

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All along the beach he watched for her, but the beach was empty. That was when he first began to think that something might have happened. He was sure that she would have come out before then.

He ran up the steps of the house and burst into the lounge. She was not there either. He changed swiftly and shouted for Watch.

" Miss Lynette," he said briskly, " where is she? "

" She lef' about two hours before."

" Where? Where did she leave for? "

Watch shrugged. " She say she want go to store and I say please have some tea and she say—"

" I thought I told you to look after her."

" I can' stop her, Cap'n, if she want to go," Watch said primly, and his logic was irrefutable.

Southey went back into the living-room. The statuette was missing. He suddenly felt fear, and at the same time an enormous anger at himself. It was one of his faults in dealing with students that he never gave them the benefit of thinking them intelligent. Unconsciously he had treated Lynette in the same way. He had been so immersed in his own mental processes that he never considered that anyone else might have caught a glimmering of what was happening.

That omission had almost cost him his life. And Lynette's?

When Southey reached the shop of Xenophon Metaxas he found it shuttered and barred, and then he knew the meaning of real panic. He hammered on the door but only the echoes in the back answered him.

Three Africans were standing under a street lamp about twenty yards away, smoking and talking softly. He went over. Did they know where Mr. Metaxas was? No, they didn't, but they had seen him leave in a lorry about, oh, two hours ago. Had they seen a woman with him? No, only his driver, Jackson. Were they certain that there was no woman? No. There may have been. It was getting dark. Southey thanked them and ran up the street to the police post.

Harry had not told him a truck was going through tonight.

An African constable was on duty.

" Good evening," Southey said. " Head Constable Celliers, please."

The African looked up from the duty book in which he was writing.

" Head Constable Celliers is not here, seh."

" Oh," Southey said, hiding his irritation. " Where can I get hold of him? "

" He gone to Port Christie with the old baas."

Southey had forgotten the arrangements for Harvey-Greig's body. " Please get the Port Christie police on the telephone then."

" I can' do that."'

" Why? " Southey was beginning to lose his temper.

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"The lines are down. The storm wind blow them all down."

"What about the police radio?"

"Only radio we got is in the van and the Head Constable he take the van."

"Yes. All right."

Now what? It was a two-hour drive to Port Christie in the opposite direction on a spine-breaking twisting road. And what if the telephone line was down there as well? It was six hours to the border and the lorry had two hours' start. But he should be able to travel faster than Metaxas.

He ran up the dusty main street of the village, deserted now, to where the Simca was parked. It was dusty and mud-caked from the journey north, but the petrol gauge was showing nearly full and he started the engine with a roar. The last thing he saw was the white-garbed figure of Watch standing gloomily on the verandah contemplating his "cooked dinnah" getting cold. Then the back tyres spun on the loose gravel and he was bucketing up to the coast road intersection.

Southey had never been a fast driver, for it is not in keeping with the status of an academician to arrive at his university on screaming tyres and smelling of burnt rubber. Now he regretted it. He drove as fast as he could but he knew that a more capable driver would be putting miles an hour faster on the clock.

As he drove, he tried to form some sort of plan, but mile after mile of dusty, twisting road hurried beneath his wheels, and all he had was an assortment of jumbled thoughts.

He tried to fit together the pieces of the puzzle. That Harry had found what was left of the *San João*, Southey had no doubt. He had discovered the sandbank while he was still a youth, and had kept the few coins he saw glittering there more as good luck charms than anything else.

Ironically, it had been because he wanted to buy a present for Lynette that Harry had taken the coins up to Xenophon Metaxas. The Greek was no fool. He had given Harry a few pounds for the little hoard and had then bided his time. It was only recently that Harry had confided to Metaxas the whereabouts of the sandbank, and they had begun to dredge it at night with a bucket. It was slow work bringing the buckets up and washing the sand through a fine sieve but it had been worth it. There was gold, silver, and the occasional precious stone. Their best hauls came after a storm had shifted the sands.

Metaxas already had a steady business exporting African curios, so there was little difficulty in smelting down the metal, making hollow statuettes to work out at the same weight as those of baked clay, and then covering them with black shellac.

The rest was easy. They travelled by lorry to Lourenco Marques, from there by dhow to Zanzibar, and thence to India—where the black market price for gold is £20 an ounce in comparison to just over £12 on the official market in London.

There wasn't enough to make Metaxas a millionaire but it

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would certainly keep him in comfort many miles away from the slums of the Piraeus, and with enough for a regular " allowance " for Harry.

Southey drove on into the night, and still he had no idea how he was going to stop a lorry on a lonely coast road without injuring the one person who had suddenly become precious to him.

At the back of his mind where all the unsolved equations of his life lay, there was one that bulked larger than the others. Why had Harry killed Harvey-Greig? He had admitted it, and his reason had been obvious enough: the old man was getting suspicious. But Southey could not believe that that was everything. Harry had not seemed a man who would kill for no better reason than that.

And twice he had almost killed Southey. Instead of taking the hollow gold curio which Southey had been sold by mistake, and simply replacing it with the other, making an unobtrusive exit from the house, he had deliberately attacked Southey. Why? Could it be that he was jealous of Lynette?

He came up on the tail lights of the lorry before he was ready for it, and had to brake sharply. It was about a hundred and fifty yards ahead of him. The road was cut into the mountains that came down to the sea, so that on his left was a sheer sandstone wall, and on his right an eight hundred foot drop into the sea.

It was obvious that he could not pass on the left, and he was quite aware that if Metaxas knew it was Southey in the car he would order Jackson to let him come up level with the lorry on the right and then force him off the edge of the road.

But that chance had to be taken. He did not think Metaxas knew what car he was driving. Nor was there any reason why he should be suspicious of being followed.

Southey came up as normally as possible, flicked his lights up and down, and gave a discreet and courteous little toot on his hooter. Immediately and normally, the lorry swung to the left. The Simca bounded forward for the gap. Southey could not look round to see if he had been recognised, but kept his eyes half on the big front wheel of the truck. If it suddenly swerved right . . .

The wheel remained straight and the Simca was through. Southey put his hand out of the window and waved his thanks—it would take their eyes off the back of his neck. Then the Simca was out of the truck's headlights and Southey was breathing normally again.

He drove as fast as he could for about five miles, and then, on a severe hairpin bend, stopped, brought the car round to face the opposite way, and doused the yellow French foglights. He got out, put a monkey wrench into his pocket, walked to where he could see the road, and waited.

He waited until the lorry was almost on the curve, then reached into the Simca and flicked on the powerful headlights. The truck came cautiously round the corner, full into the bright yellow rays.

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He saw the African driver put one hand up to his eyes, saw Lynette, who was sitting between them on the front seat, cover her face with her hands, saw Xenophon Metaxas turn away slightly so as not to get the full glare.

There was a hiss of airbrakes, and the lorry pulled up on a down slope about thirty yards from Southey's car, which was now blocking the road.

Somehow Southey had to get Jackson and Metaxas out of the cab. Then? Then somehow . . . He began to walk forward shielding his eyes from the truck's headlights, covering most of his face. Metaxas thought he was dead, there was no reason for immediate suspicion. In any case his own headlights were so bright that they must be almost blinding those sitting in the cab of the truck.

"I've got a flat," he called, speaking in Afrikaans. "And I don't know how the jack works. Can you give me a hand?"

He saw Metaxas lean across Lynette and say something to Jackson, then the African got out of the car and slouched towards him. He let Jackson come level with him and then turned to walk back to the car. He'd allow the African to bend over to inspect the rear wheel—and then he'd hit him. His fingers closed over the handle of the wrench.

"Stop!" It was the Greek's voice from the truck. "Stay where you are, Mr. Southey."

The African whirled. Southey jerked at the wrench in his pocket but it wouldn't come free. He launched himself in a Rugby tackle, hitting Jackson in the midriff with his right shoulder and sending them both sprawling on to the gravel. The African was as quick as a cat. His arms shot out for Southey's throat. Southey ducked his head down on to his chest and struck out as hard as he could, feeling his knuckles jar on the other's cheekbone. Momentarily Jackson's hands loosened their grip and Southey hit him again so that the African fell back, cracking his head on the ground.

Again he tried to free the wrench and again it caught in the material of his pocket. In that instant Jackson clamped his legs round Southey's waist, pinning his right arm to his side. Southey drew back his left arm to hit the African in the throat and, as he did so, there was the flat crack of a pistol from somewhere to his right. He felt a tremendous blow on the head.

The pressure of Jackson's scissor grip slackened abruptly and Southey found himself lying full length on the road fighting for consciousness.

Dimly he saw Jackson standing over him with a boulder in his hands. He tried to turn away but had no strength. The African raised the rock. Then the Greek's voice came again through the waves of dizziness and pain.

"Don't be a fool, Jackson. Drop it. Put him in the car. In the front seat, as though he was driving. Then release the brake and let it go over."

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He felt strong hands take him under the arms and drag him across the road. He heard the door of his car open. Desperately he clawed at the mudguard, bumper, running-board. Hanging on here, getting his legs in the way there.

Jackson hit him in the neck. He felt one side of his body become numb. Grimly he held on to the inside of the mudguard with the other hand.

"Hurry up!" It was the Greek again.

The African struck for the second time. But now Southey rolled with the blow and Jackson's fist crashed into the door hinge. He stepped back cursing.

"Headlights!" Metaxas shouted, and Southey heard running steps. "Mind! I'll hit him with this!" The pistol rose and started coming down at his head and there was nothing he could do about it this time for Jackson was holding him.

There was a sudden noise. It was the long-drawn hiss of air-brakes being released. The pistol stopped its downward arc. Metaxas leapt away and swore.

The big truck was moving. Gaining speed. It came down towards them. Metaxas moved to meet it.

"Stop!" he screamed. He pointed the pistol and fired. The bullet whined off the top of the cab. He sprinted across the road to get on the driver's side.

Lynette watched him carefully. He looked like a marionette in the glaring headlights, jerking across the gravel, waving his big pistol. She calculated, waited until the last moment, brought the wheel hard over, then jumped for the road.

The big bumper caught Metaxas just above his right hip, picking him up like the cowcatcher of a locomotive. The front wheel dipped as it went over the edge. For a moment he was silhouetted against the night sky—and then he was gone and the truck was gone and there was only the sound of a heavy crash as it hit the rocks far below.

The African watched it go over in petrified silence and then, like a shadow, turned from the lighted roadway and disappeared into the night.

Southey watched as Lynette ran towards him. She was covered in dust from her jump to the road and her dress was torn. Standing together in the beams of the yellow headlights, he thought they made a particularly down-at-heel couple.

She had her hands on his shoulders and was pressing her head against his chest. "I thought you were dead," she said, a high note of hysteria in her voice. "He told me you were dead."

Southey drove back slowly. He was stiff and sore and his head ached abominably where the bullet had nicked him. He had had to tell her about Harry, and he had done so, not knowing how much he had meant to her, uncertain how she would react. It seemed she had felt his apprehension, for she turned in the seat to face him and put her hand on his arm.

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"Look, John," she said, "I'm sad for Harry, that's only natural, but there's nothing more. He was in love with me but I never loved him other than in the way that children love each other. And even that became sour."

"How? You never told me."

"Well, it was just one of those unfortunate things. You know how it is, you start playing together as children and go on playing through adolescence and then there comes a day when—when you're not playing any longer—and suddenly you're grown up and you want the things that grownups want. That's what happened to Harry. One day he grew up and wanted me. And he—he—tried—and Daddy came into the house just then and saw us struggling and he took a rhino-hide sjambok and thrashed Harry. It was frightening. I've never seen him like that before or since. I thought he was going to kill him.

"Then he started investigating and found out that Harry was a foundling and that his mother had been a Durban prostitute."

"Did he tell Harry?"

"Yes. I've always thought that was cruel, but then Daddy was really only trying to protect me. He could be very hard at times. You see, Harry thought his parents had been killed."

"And that would have been about the time he changed his name," Southey said.

"Yes, I suppose it would've. Why?"

"I 'was just wondering."

It was the last piece of the puzzle: the motive. And now Southey knew why Harry had taken the name Mendoza. After he found the wreck he must have gone to the historical sources and read about it and there he would have come across the story of Donna Leonor Mendoza who gave herself to an African chief in order that the survivors of the *San Joao* might pass unmolested through his territory—and that her two small sons might go with them.

It was the sort of romantic and tragic occurrence that would have appealed to Harry and Southey had no difficulty in understanding Harry's need for a retreat into fantasy.

He also understood why Harry had suddenly taken Metaxas into his confidence about the wreck. When Lynette returned to St. Margaret's Bay a widow, he must have convinced himself that his chances with her were at last a reality. It must have seemed like fate. All he needed was money.

He turned to Lynette, wanting to tell her what he knew, but she had fallen asleep with her head on his shoulder, so he left her. There would be plenty of time for talk.

In the east it was beginning to grow lighter. They would arrive home just in time for Watch's "cooked blekfas."

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Solution on Page 24

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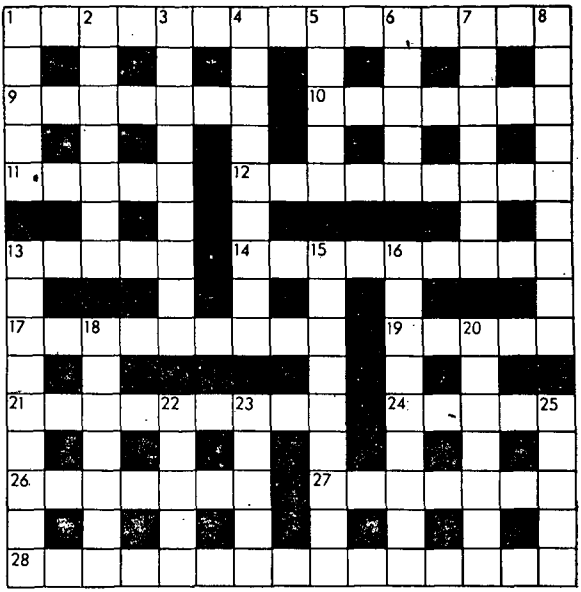

CLUES

Across

1 Store bore? No, nuisance value (7-8).

9 Scooping boy and fish (7).

10 Girl ace stuck in the ice! (7).

11 Giants in bog rescue (5).

12 Supple, with some Lithuanian extraction (9).

13 Track's a bit poverty-stricken (5).

14 Riotous ending with bygone loan (9).

17 These reptiles aren't one thing or the other (4-5).

19 Might gie us a giftie, Burns said (5).

21 I tin lutes by Act of Parliament (9).

24 Like the hart? (5)

26 Malevolent legacy? (3, 4).

27 Astronomic cast, maybe (3-4).

28 Dentists' paper? No, Peter Fleming's book (4, 4, 7).

Down

1 Length in the firm is a fiddle (5).

2 Endure and German spilt gore (7).

3 Gemini! The boat-load contains double props (4-5).

4 Sounds quite a hill, or a governor (9).

5 Of dexterous man, perhaps (5).

6 I'm a long time, or a likeness (5).

7 A stout five hundred to one attitude (7).

8 Tease puts men between heights (9).

13 Feeling something's wrong I coin Puss (9).

15 In the Maquis, perhaps (9).

16 Undemocratic, but contains tree (9).

18 Bath waste may (7).

20 "If this is coffee I —— ——" (4, 3).

22 Does he do steal-work? (5).

23 La Gina (5).

25 Knightly-sounding, but uncivil (5).

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